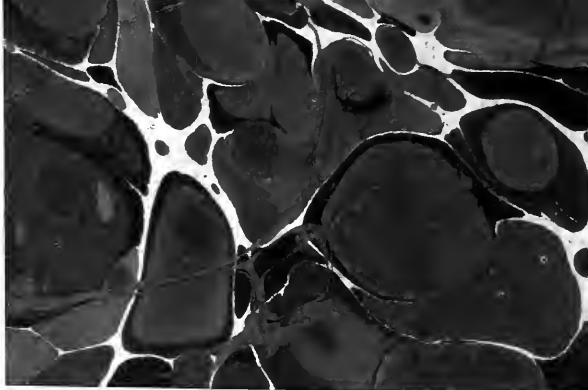


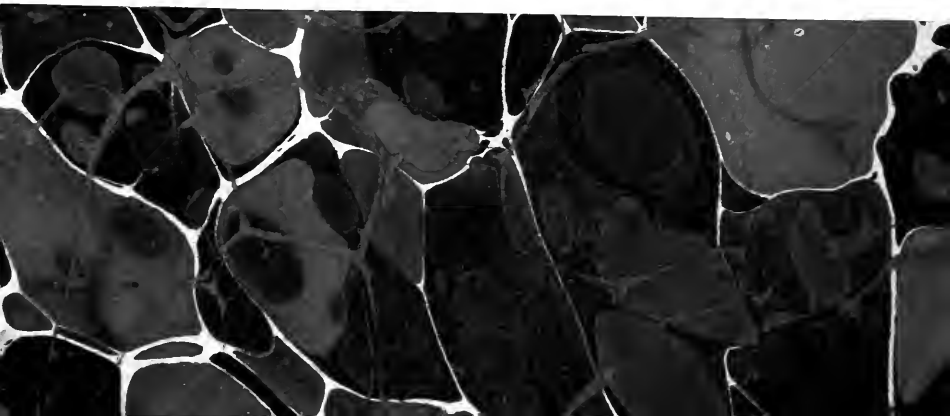


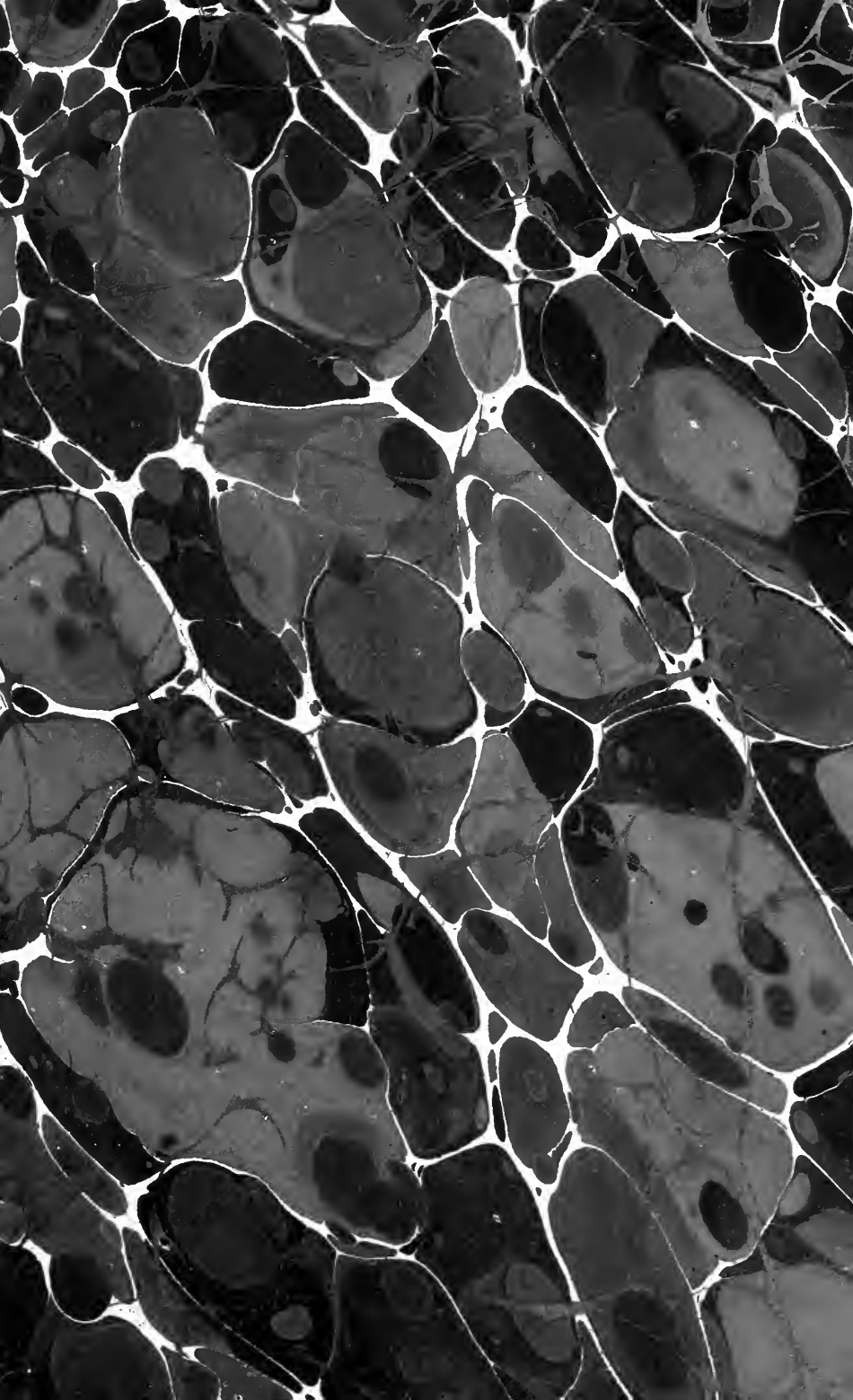
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V I T T O R I A

BY

GEORGE MEREDITH

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOLUME III.

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V I T T O R I A.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EPISODES OF THE REVOLT AND THE WAR.

COUNT KARL LENKENSTEIN.—THE STORY OF THE GUIDASCARPI.—THE VICTORY OF THE VOLUNTEERS.

THE smoke of a pistol-shot thinned away while there was yet silence.

“It is a saving of six charges of Austrian ammunition,” said Pericles.

Vittoria stared at the scene, losing faith in her eyesight. She could in fact see no distinct thing beyond what appeared as an illuminated copper medallion, held at a great distance from her, with a dead man and a towering female figure stamped on it.

The events following were like a rush of water on her senses. There was fighting up the street of the village, and a struggle in the space where Rinaldo

had fallen; successive yellowish shots under the rising moonlight, cries from Italian lips, quick words of command from German in Italian, and one sturdy bull's roar of a voice that called across the tumult to the Austro-Italian soldiery, "*Venite fratelli!*—come, brothers, come under our banner!" She heard "Rinaldo!" called.

This was a second attack of the volunteers for the rescue of their captured comrades. They fought more desperately than on the hill outside the village: they fought with steel. Shot enfiladed them; yet they bore forward in a scattered body up to that spot where Rinaldo lay, shouting for him. There they turned,—they fled.

Then there was a perfect stillness, succeeding the strife as quickly, Vittoria thought, as a breath yielded succeeds a breath taken.

She accused the heavens of injustice.

Pericles, prostrate on the floor, moaned that he was wounded. She said "Bleed to death!"

"It is my soul, it is my soul is wounded for you, Sandra."

"Dreadful craven man!" she muttered.

"When my soul is shaking for your safety, Sandra Belloni!" Pericles turned his ear up. "For myself—nothing; it is for you, for you."

Assured of the cessation of arms by delicious silence he jumped to his feet.

“Ah! brutes that fight. It is *immonde*; it is unnatural!”

He tapped his finger on the walls for marks of shot, and discovered a shot-hole in the wood-work, that had passed an arm's length above her head, into which he thrust his finger in an intense speculative meditation, shifting eyes from it to her, and throwing them aloft.

He was summoned to the presence of Count Karl, with whom he found Captain Weisspriess, Wilfrid, and officers of jägers and the Italian battalion. Barto Rizzo's wife was in a corner of the room. Weisspriess met him with a very civil greeting, and introduced him to Count Karl, who begged him to thank Vittoria for the aid she had afforded to General Schöneck's emissary in crossing the Piedmontese lines. He spoke in Italian. He agreed to conduct Pericles to a point on the route of his march where Pericles and his precious prima donna—“our very good friend,” he said, jovially—could escape the risk of unpleasant mishaps, and arrive at Trent and cities of peace by easy stages. He was marching for the neighbourhood of Vicenza.

A little before dawn Vittoria came down to the

carriage. Count Karl stood at the door to hand her in. He was young and handsome, with a soft flowing blonde moustache and pleasant eyes, a contrast to his brother, Count Lenkenstein. He repeated his thanks to her, which Pericles had not delivered ; he informed her that she was by no means a prisoner, and was simply under the guardianship of friends—"though perhaps, signorina, you will not esteem this gentleman to be one of your friends." He pointed to Weisspriess. The captain bowed, but kept aloof. Vittoria perceived a singular change in him : he had become pale and sedate. "Poor fellow, he has had his dose," said Count Karl. "He is, I beg to assure you, one of your most vehement admirers."

A piece of her property that flushed her with recollections, yet made her grateful, was presently handed to her, though not in the captain's presence, by a soldier. It was the silver-hilted dagger, Carlo's precious gift, of which Weisspriess had taken possession in the mountain-pass over the vale of Meran, when he fought the duel with Angelo. Whether intended as a peace-offering, or as a simple restitution, it helped Vittoria to believe that Weisspriess was no longer the man he had been.

The march was ready, but Barto Rizzo's wife refused to move a foot. The officers consulted. She was brought before them. The soldiers swore with

jesting oaths that she had been carefully searched for weapons, and only wanted a whipping. "She must have it," said Weisspriess. Vittoria entreated that she might have a place beside her in the carriage. "It is more than I would have asked of you; but if you are not afraid of her," said Count Karl, with an apologetic shrug.

Her heart beat fast when she found herself alone with the terrible woman.

Till then she had never seen a tragic face. Compared with this tawny colourlessness, this evil brow, this shut mouth, Laura, even on the battle-field, looked harmless. It was like the face of a dead savage. The eyeballs were full on Vittoria, as if they dashed at an obstacle, not embraced an image. In proportion as they seemed to widen about her, Vittoria shrank. The whole woman was blood to her gaze.

When she was capable of speaking, she said entreatingly—

"I knew his brother."

Not a sign of life was given in reply.

Companionship with this ghost of broad daylight made the fluttering Tyrolese feathers at both windows a welcome sight.

Precautions had been taken to bind the woman's arms. Vittoria offered to loosen the cords, but she dared not touch her without a mark of assent.

"I know Angelo Guidascarpi, Rinaldo's brother," she spoke again.

The woman's nostrils bent inward, as when the breath we draw is keen as a sword to the heart. Vittoria was compelled to look away from her.

At the midday halt Count Karl deigned to justify to her his intended execution of Rinaldo—the accomplice in the slaying of his brother, Count Paul. He was evidently eager to obtain her good opinion of the Austrian military. "But for this miserable spirit of hatred against us," he said, "I should have espoused an Italian lady;" and he asked, "Why not? For that matter, in all but blood, we Lenkensteins are half Italian, except when Italy menaces the empire. Can you blame us for then drawing the sword in earnest?"

He proffered his version of the death of Count Paul. She kept her own silent in her bosom.

Clelia Guidascarpi, according to his statement, had first been slain by her brothers. Vittoria believed that Clelia had voluntarily submitted to death and died by her own hand. She was betrothed to an Italian nobleman of Bologna, the friend of the brothers. They had arranged the marriage; she accepted the betrothal. "She loved my brother, poor thing!" said Count Karl. "She concealed it,

and naturally. How could she take a couple of wolves into her confidence? If she had told the pair of ruffians that she was plighted to an Austrian, they would have quieted her at an earlier period. A woman! a girl!—signorina, the intolerable cowardice amazes me. It amazes me that you or any one can uphold the character of such brutes. And when she was dead they lured my brother to the house and slew him; fell upon him with daggers, stretched him at the foot of her coffin, and then—what then?—ran! ran for their lives. One has gone to his account. We shall come across the other. He is among that volunteer party which attacked us yesterday. The body was carried off by them; it is sufficient testimony that Angelo Guidascarpì is in the neighbourhood. I should be hunting him now but that I am under orders to march south-east.”

The story, as Vittoria knew it, had a different, though yet a dreadful colour.

“I could have hanged Rinaldo,” Count Karl said further. “I suppose the rascals feared I should use my right, and that is why they sent their mad baggage of a woman to spare any damage to the family pride. If I had been a man to enjoy vengeance, the rope would have swung for him. In spite of provocation, I shall simply shoot the other; I

pledge my word to it. They shall be paid in coin. I demand no interest."

Weisspriess prudently avoided her. Wilfrid held aloof. She sat in garden shade till the bugle sounded. Tyrolese and Italian soldiers were gibing at her haggard companion when she entered the carriage. Fronting this dumb creature once more, Vittoria thought of the story of the brothers. She felt herself reading it from the very page. The woman looked that evil star incarnate which Laura said they were born under.

This is in brief the story of the Guidascarpi.

They were the offspring of a Bolognese noble house, neither wealthy nor poor. In her early womanhood, Clelia was left to the care of her brothers. She declined the guardianship of Countess Ammiani because of her love for them; and the three, with their passion of hatred to the Austrians inherited from father and mother, schemed in concert to throw off the Austrian yoke. Clelia had soft features of no great mark; by her colouring she was beautiful, being dark along the eyebrows, with dark eyes, and a surpassing richness of Venetian hair. Bologna and Venice were married in her aspect. Her brothers conceived her to possess such force of mind that they held no secrets from her. They did not know that

the heart of their sister was struggling with an image of Power when she uttered hatred of it. She was in truth a woman of a soft heart, with a most impressionable imagination.

There were many suitors for the hand of Clelia Guidascari, though her dowry was not the portion of a fat estate. Her old nurse counselled the brothers that they should consent to her taking a husband. They fulfilled this duty as one that must be done, and she became sorrowfully the betrothed of a nobleman of Bologna; from which hour she had no cheerfulness. The brothers quitted Bologna for Venice, where there was the bed of a conspiracy. On their return they were shaken by rumours of their sister's misconduct. An Austrian name was allied to hers in busy mouths. A lady, their distant relative, whose fame was light, had withdrawn her from the silent house, and made display of her. Since she had seen more than an Italian girl should see, the brothers proposed to the nobleman, her betrothed, to break the treaty; but he was of a mind to hurry on the marriage, and recollecting now that she was but a woman, the brothers fixed a day for her espousals, tenderly, without reproach. She had the choice of taking the vows or surrendering her hand. Her old nurse prayed for the day of her espousals to come

with a quicker step. One night she surprised Count Paul Lenkenstein at Clelia's window. Rinaldo was in the garden below. He moved to the shadow of a cypress, and was seen moving by the old nurse. The lover took the single kiss he had come for, was led through the chamber, and passed unchallenged into the street. Clelia sat between locked doors and darkened windows, feeling colder to the brothers she had been reared with than to all other men upon the earth. They sent for her after a lapse of hours. Her old nurse was kneeling at their feet. Rinaldo asked for the name of her lover. She answered with it. Angelo said, "It will be better for you to die : but if you cannot do so easy a thing as that, prepare widow's garments." They forced her to write three words to Count Paul, calling him to her window at midnight. Rinaldo fetched a priest : Angelo laid out two swords. An hour before the midnight, Clelia's old nurse raised the house with her cries. Clelia was stretched dead in her chamber. The brothers kissed her in turn, and sat, one at her head, one at her feet. At midnight her lover stood among them. He was gravely saluted, and bidden to look upon the dead body. Angelo said to him, "Had she lived you should have wedded her hand. She is gone of her own free choice, and one of us follows her." With the

sweat of anguish on his forehead, Count Paul drew sword. The window was barred ; six male domestics of the household held high lights in the chamber ; the priest knelt beside one corpse, awaiting the other.

Vittoria's imagination could not go beyond that scene, but she looked out on the brother of the slain youth with great pity, and with a strange curiosity. The example given by Clelia of the possible love of an Italian girl for the white uniform, set her thinking whether so monstrous a fact could ever be doubled in this world. "Could it happen to me?" she asked herself, and smiled, as she half-fashioned the words on her lips, "It is a pretty uniform."

Her reverie was broken by a hiss of "Traitor!" from the woman opposite.

She coloured guiltily, tried to speak, and sat trembling. A divination of intense hatred had read the thought within her breast. The woman's face was like the wearing away of smoke from a spot whence shot was issued. Vittoria walked for the remainder of the day. That fearful companion oppressed her. She felt that one who followed armies should be cast in such a frame, and now desired with all her heart to render full obedience to Carlo, and abide in Brescia, or even in Milan—a city she thought of shyly.

The march was hurried to the plains of the Vicentino, for enemies were thick in this district. Pericles refused to quit the soldiers, though Count Karl used persuasion. The young nobleman said to Vittoria, "Be on your guard when you meet my sister Anna. I tell you, we can be as revengeful as any of you : but you will exonerate me. I do my duty ; I seek to do no more."

At an inn that they reached towards evening she saw the innkeeper shoot a little ball of paper at an Italian corporal, who put his foot on it and picked it up. This soldier subsequently passed through the ranks of his comrades, gathering winks and grins. They were to have rested at the inn, but Count Karl was warned by scouts, which was sufficient to make Pericles cling to him in avoidance of the volunteers, of whom mainly he was in terror. He looked ague-stricken. He would not listen to her, or to reason in any shape. "I am on the sea—shall I trust a boat? I stick to a ship," he said. The soldiers marched till midnight. It was arranged that the carriage should strike off for Schio at dawn. The soldiers bivouacked on the slope of one of the low undulations falling to the Vicentino plain. Vittoria spread her cloak, and lay under bare sky, not suffering the woman to be ejected from the carriage. Hitherto Luigi had

avoided her. Under pretence of doubling Count Karl's cloak as a pillow for her head, he whispered, "If the signorina hears shots let her lie on the ground flat as a sheet." The peacefulness surrounding her precluded alarm. There was brilliant moonlight, and the host of stars, all dim; and first they beckoned her up to come away from trouble, and then, through long gazing, she had the fancy that they bent and swam about her, making her feel that she lay in the hollows of a warm hushed sea. She wished for her lover.

Men and officers were lying at a stone's-throw distant. The Tyrolese had lit a fire for cooking purposes, by which four of them stood, and, lifting hands, sang one of their mountain songs, that seemed to her to spring like clear water into air, and fall wavering as a feather falls, or the light about a stone in water. It lulled her to a half-sleep, during which she fancied hearing a broad imitation of a cat's-call from the mountains, that was answered out of the camp, and a talk of officers arose in connection with the response, and subsided. The carriage was in the shadows of the fire. In a little while Luigi and the driver began putting the horses to, and she saw Count Karl and Weisspriess go up to Luigi, who declared loudly that it was time. The woman inside

was aroused. Weisspriess helped to drag her out. Luigi kept making much noise, and apologized for it by saying that he desired to awaken his master, who was stretched in a secure circle among the Tyrolese. Presently Vittoria beheld the woman's arms thrown out free; the next minute they were around the body of Weisspriess, and a shrewd cry issued from Count Karl. Shots rang from the outposts; the Tyrolese sprang to arms; "Sandra!" was shouted by Pericles; and once more she heard the *Venite fratelli!* of the bull's voice, and a stream of volunteers dashed at the Tyrolese with sword and dagger and bayonet. The Austro-Italians stood in a crescent line—the ominous form of incipient military insubordination. Their officers stormed at them, and called for Count Karl and for Weisspreiss. The latter replied like a man stifling, but Count Karl's voice was silent.

"Weisspriess! here, to me!" the captain sang out in Italian.

"Ammiani! here, to me!" was replied.

Vittoria struck her hands together in electrical gladness at her lover's voice and name. It rang most cheerfully. Her home was in the conflict where her lover fought, and she muttered with ecstasy, "We have met! we have met!" The sound of the keen steel, so exciting to dream of, paralysed her nerves

in a way that powder, more terrible for a woman's imagination, would not have done, and she could only feebly advance. It was spacious moonlight, but the moonlight appeared to have got of a brassy hue to her eyes, though the sparkle of the steel was white; and she felt, too, and wondered at it, that the cries and the noise went to her throat, as if threatening to choke her. Very soon she found herself standing there, watching for the issue of the strife, almost as dead as a weight in scales, quite incapable of clear vision.

Matched against the Tyrolese alone, the volunteers had an equal fight in point of numbers, and the advantage of possessing a leader; for Count Karl was down, and Weisspriess was still entangled in the woman's arms. When at last Wilfrid got him free, the unsupported Tyrolese were giving ground before Carlo Ammiani and his followers. These fought with stern fury, keeping close up to their enemy, rarely shouting. They presented something like the line of a classic bow, with its arrow-head; while the Tyrolese were huddled in groups, and clubbed at them, and fell back for space, and ultimately crashed upon their betraying brothers-in-arms, swinging rifles and flying. The Austro-Italians rang out a Viva for Italy, and let them fly: they were swept from the scene.

Vittoria heard her lover addressing his followers. Then he and Angelo stood over Count Karl, whom she had forgotten. Angelo ran up to her, but gave place the moment Carlo came; and Carlo drew her by the hand swiftly to an obscure bend of the rolling ground, and stuck his sword in the earth, and there put his arms round her and held her fast.

"Obey me now," were his first words.

"Yes," she answered.

He was harsh of eye and tongue, not like the gentle youth she had been torn from at the door of La Scala.

"Return; make your way to Brescia. My mother is in Brescia. Milan is hateful. I throw myself into Vicenza. Can I trust you to obey?"

"Carlo, what evil have you heard of me?"

"I listen to no tales."

"Let me follow you to Vicenza and be your handmaid, my beloved."

"Say that you obey."

"I have said it."

He seemed to shut her in his heart, so closely was she enfolded.

"Since La Scala," she murmured; and he bent his lips to her ear, whispering, "not one thought of another woman! and never till I die."

“And I only of you, Carlo, and for you, my lover, my lover!”

“You love me absolutely?”

“I belong to you.”

“I could be a coward and pray for life to live to hear you say it.”

“I feel I breathe another life when you are away from me.”

“You belong to me; you are my own?”

“You take my voice, beloved.”

“And when I claim you, I am to have you?”

“Am I not in your hands?”

“The very instant I make my claim you will say yes?”

“I shall not have strength for more than to nod.”

Carlo shuddered at the delicious image of her weakness.

“My Sandra! Vittoria, my soul! my bride!”

“O my Carlo! Do you go to Vicenza? And did you know I was among these people?”

“You will hear everything from little Leone Rufo, who is wounded and accompanies you to Brescia. Speak of nothing. Speak my name, and look at me. I deserve two minutes of blessedness.”

“Ah, my dearest, if I am sweet to you, you might have many!”

“No ; they begin to hum a reproach at me already, for I must be marching. Vicenza will soon bubble on a fire, I suspect. Comfort my mother ; she wants a young heart at her elbow. If she is alone, she feeds on every rumour ; other women scatter in emotions what poisons her. And when my bride is with her, I am between them.”

“Yes, Carlo, I will go,” said Vittoria, seeing her duty at last through tenderness.

Carlo sprang from her side to meet Angelo, with whom he exchanged some quick words. The bugle was sounding, and Barto Rizzo was audible. Luigi came to her, ruefully announcing that the volunteers had sacked the carriage—behaved worse than the Austrians ; and that his padrone, the Signor Antonio-Pericles, was off like a gossamer. Angelo induced her to remain on the spot where she stood till the carriage was seen on the Schio road, when he led her to it, saying that Carlo had serious work to do. Count Karl Lenkenstein was lying in the carriage, supported by Wilfrid and by young Leone Rufo, who sat laughing, with one eye under a cross-bandage and an arm slung in a handkerchief. Vittoria desired to wait that she might see her lover once more ; but Angelo entreated her that she should depart, too earnestly to leave her in doubt of there being good

reason for it and for her lover's absence. He pointed to Wilfrid: "Barto Rizzo captured this man; Carlo has released him. Take him with you to attend on his superior officer." She drew Angelo's observation to the first morning colours over the peaks. He looked up, and she knew that he remembered that morning of their flight from the inn. Perhaps he had then had the image of his brother in his mind, for the colours seemed to be plucking at his heart, and he said, "I have lost him."

"God help you, my friend!" said Vittoria, her throat choking.

Angelo pointed at the insensible nobleman: "These live. I do not grudge him his breath or his chances; but why should these men take so much killing? Weisspriess has risen, as though I struck the blow of a babe. But we—one shot does for us! Nevertheless, signorina," Angelo smiled firmly, "I complain of nothing while we march forward."

He kissed his hand to her, and turned back to his troop. The carriage was soon under the shadows of the mountains.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EPISODES OF THE REVOLT AND THE WAR.

THE DEEDS OF BARTO RIZZO.—THE MEETING AT ROVEREDO.

AT Schio there was no medical attendance to be obtained for Count Karl, and he begged so piteously to be taken on to Roveredo, that, on his promising to give Leone Rufo a pass, Vittoria decided to work her way round to Brescia by the Alpine route. She supposed Pericles to have gone off among the Tyrolese, and wished in her heart that Wilfrid had gone likewise, for he continued to wear that look of sad stupefaction which was the harshest reproach to her. Leone was unconquerably gay in spite of his wounds. He narrated the doings of the volunteers, with proud eulogies of Carlo Ammiani's gallant leadership; but the devices of Barto Rizzo appeared to have struck his imagination most. "He is positively a cat—a

great cat," Leone said. "He can run a day ; he can fast a week ; he can climb a house ; he can drop from a crag ; and he never lets go his hold. If he says a thing to his wife, she goes true as a bullet to the mark. The two make a complete piece of artillery. We are all for Barto, though our captain Carlo is often enraged with him. But there's no getting on without him. We have found that."

Rinaldo and Angelo Guidascarpi and Barto Rizzo had done many daring feats. They had first, heading about a couple of dozen out of a force of sixty, endeavoured to surprise the fortress Rocca d'Anfo in Lake Idro—an insane enterprise that touched on success, and would have been an achievement had all the men who followed them been made of the same desperate stuff. Beaten off, they escaped up the Val di Ledro, and secretly entered Trent, where they hoped to spread revolt, but the Austrian commandant knew what a quantity of dry wood was in the city, and stamped his heel on sparks. A revolt was prepared notwithstanding the proclamation of imprisonment and death. Barto undertook to lead a troop against the Buon Consiglio barracks, while Angelo and Rinaldo cleared the ramparts. It chanced, whether from treachery or extra-vigilance was unknown, that the troops paid domiciliary visits an hour

before the intended outbreak, and the three were left to accomplish their task alone. They remained in the city several days, hunted from house to house, and finally they were brought to bay at night on the roof of a palace where the Lenkenstein ladies were residing. Barto took his dagger between his teeth and dropped to the balcony of Lena's chamber. The brothers soon after found the roof-trap opened to them, and Lena and Anna conducted them to the postern-door. There, Angelo asked whom they had to thank. The terrified ladies gave their name; upon hearing which, Rinaldo turned and said that he would pay for a charitable deed to the extent of his power, and would not meanly allow them to befriend persons who were to continue strangers to them. He gave the name of Guidascarpi, and relieved his brother, as well as himself, of a load of obligation, for the ladies raised wild screams on the instant. In falling from the walls to the road, Rinaldo hurt his foot. Barto lifted him on his back, and journeyed with him so till at the appointed place he met his wife, who dressed the foot, and led them out of the line of pursuit, herself bending under the beloved load. Her adoration of Rinaldo was deep as a mother's, pure as a virgin's, fiery as a saint's. Leone Rufo dwelt on it the more fervidly from seeing

Vittoria's expression of astonishment. The woman led them to a cave in the rocks, where she had stored provision, and sat two days expecting the signal from Trent. They saw numerous bands of soldiers set out along the valleys—merry men whom it was Barto's pleasure to beguile by shouts, as a relief for his parched weariness upon the baking rock. Accident made it an indiscretion. A glass was levelled at them by a mounted officer, and they had quickly to be moving. Angelo knew the voice of Weisspriess in the word of command to the soldiers, and the call to him to surrender. Weisspriess followed them across the mountain track, keeping at their heels, though they doubled and adopted all possible contrivances to shake him off. He was joined by Count Karl Lenkenstein on the day when Carlo Ammiani encountered them, with the rear of Colonel Corte's band marching for Vicenza. In the collision between the Austrians and the volunteers, Rinaldo was taken fighting upon his knee-cap. Leone cursed the disabled foot which had carried the hero into action, to cast him at the mercy of his enemies; but recollection of that sight of Rinaldo fighting far ahead and alone, half-down like a scuttled ship, stood like a flower in the lad's memory. The volunteers devoted themselves to liberate or avenge him. It was then

that Barto Rizzo sent his wife upon her mission. Leone assured Vittoria that Angelo was aware of its nature, and approved it—hoped that the same might be done for himself. He shook his head when she asked if Count Ammiani approved it likewise.

“ Signorina, Count Ammiani has a grudge against Barto, though he can’t help making use of him. Our captain Carlo is too much of a mere soldier. He would have allowed Rinaldo to be strung up, and Barto does not owe him obedience in those things.”

“ But why did this Barto Rizzo employ a woman’s hand ? ”

“ The woman was capable. No man could have got permission to move freely among the rascal Austrians, even in the character of a deserter. She did, and she saved him from the shame of execution. And besides, it was her punishment. You are astonished ? Barto Rizzo punishes royally. He never forgives, and he never persecutes ; he waits for his opportunity. That woman disobeyed him once—once only ; but once was enough. It occurred in Milan, I believe. She released an Austrian, or did something—I don’t know the story exactly—and Barto said to her, ‘ Now you can wash out your crime and send your boy to heaven unspotted, with

one blow.' I saw her set out to do it. She was all teeth and eyes, like a frightened horse; she walked like a Muse in a garden."

Vittoria discovered that her presence among the Austrians had been known to Carlo. Leone alluded slightly to Barto Rizzo's confirmed suspicion of her, saying that it was his weakness to be suspicious of women. The volunteers, however, were all in her favour, and had jeered at Barto on his declaring that she might, in proof of her willingness to serve the cause, have used her voice for the purpose of subjugating the wavering Austro-Italians, who wanted as much coaxing as women. Count Karl had been struck to earth by Barto Rizzo. "Not with his boasted neatness, I imagine," Leone said. In fact, the dagger had grazed an ivory portrait of a fair Italian head wreathed by violets in Count Karl's breast.

Vittoria recognised the features of Violetta d'Isorella as the original of the portrait.

They arrived at Roveredo late in the evening. The wounded man again entreated Vittoria to remain by him till a messenger should bring one of his sisters from Trent. "See," she said to Leone, "how I give grounds for suspicion of me; I nurse an enemy."

"Here is a case where Barto is distinctly to blame," the lad replied. "The poor fellow must want nursing, for he can't smoke."

Anna von Lenkenstein came from Trent to her brother's summons. Vittoria was by his bedside, and the sufferer had fallen asleep with his head upon her arm. Anna looked upon this scene with more hateful amazement than her dull eyelids could express. She beckoned imperiously for her to come away, but Vittoria would not allow him to be disturbed, and Anna sat and faced her. The sleep was long. The eyes of the two women met from time to time, and Vittoria thought that Barto Rizzo's wife, though more terrible, was pleasanter to behold, and less brutal, than Anna. The moment her brother stirred, Anna repeated her imperious gesture, murmuring, "Away! out of my sight!" With great delicacy of touch she drew the arm from the pillow and thrust it back, and then motioning in an undisguised horror, said, "Go." Vittoria rose to go.

"Is it my Lena?" came from Karl's faint lips.

"It is your Anna."

"I should have known," he moaned.

Vittoria left them.

Some hours later, Countess Lena appeared, bringing a Trentino doctor. She said when she beheld

Vittoria, "Are you our evil genius, then?" Vittoria felt that she must necessarily wear that aspect to them.

Still greater was Lena's amazement when she looked on Wilfrid. She passed him without a sign.

Vittoria had to submit to an interview with both sisters before her departure. Apart from her distress on their behalf, they had always seemed as very weak, flippant young women to her, and she could have smiled in her heart when Anna pointed to a day of retribution in the future.

"I shall not seek to have you assassinated," Anna said; "do not suppose that I mean the knife or the pistol. But your day will come, and I can wait for it. You murdered my brother Paul: you have tried to murder my brother Karl. I wish you to leave this place convinced of one thing:—you shall be repaid for it."

There was no direct allusion either to Weisspriess or to Wilfrid.

Lena spoke of the army. "You think our cause is ruined because we have insurrection on all sides of us: you do not know our army. We can fight the Hungarians with one hand, and you Italians with the other—with a little finger. On what spot have we

given way? We have to weep, it is true; but tears do not testify to defeat; and already I am inclined to pity those fools who have taken part against us. Some have experienced the fruits of their folly."

This was the nearest approach to a hint at Wilfrid's misconduct.

Lena handed Leone's pass to Vittoria, and drawing out a little pocket almanac, said, "You proceed towards Milan, I presume. I do not love your society, mademoiselle Belloni—or Campa, yet I do not mind making an appointment—the doctor says a month will set my brother on his feet again,—I will make an appointment to meet you in Milan or Como, or anywhere in your present territories, during the month of August. That affords time for a short siege and two pitched battles."

She appeared to be expecting a retort.

Vittoria replied, "I could beg one thing on my knees of you, Countess Lena."

"And that is——?" Lena threw her head up superbly.

"Pardon my old friend the service he did me through friendship."

The sisters interchanged looks. Lena flushed angrily.

Anna said, "The person to whom you allude is here."

"He is attending on your brother."

"Did he help this last assassin to escape, perchance?"

Vittoria sickened at the cruel irony, and felt that she had perhaps done ill in beginning to plead for Wilfrid.

"He is here ; let him speak for himself : but listen to him, Countess Lena."

"A dishonourable man had better be dumb," interposed Anna.

"Ah ! it is I who have offended you."

"Is that his excuse ?"

Vittoria kept her eyes on the fiercer sister, who now declined to speak.

"I will not excuse my own deeds ; perhaps I cannot. We Italians are in a hurricane ; I cannot reflect. It may be that I do not act more thinkingly than a wild beast."

"You have spoken it," Anna exclaimed.

"Countess Lena, he fights in your ranks as a common soldier. He encounters more than a common soldier's risks."

"The man is brave,—we knew that," said Anna.

"He is more than brave, he is devoted. He fights

against us, without hope of reward from you. Have I utterly ruined him?"

"I imagine that you may regard it as a fact that you have utterly ruined him," said Anna, moving to break up the parting interview. Lena turned to follow her.

"Ladies, if it is I who have hardened your hearts I am more guilty than I thought." Vittoria said no more. She knew that she had been speaking badly, or ineffectually, by a haunting flatness of sound, as of an unstrung instrument, in her ears: she was herself unstrung and dispirited, while the recollection of Anna's voice was like a sombre conquering monotony on a low chord, with which she felt insufficient to compete.

Leone was waiting in the carriage to drive to the ferry across the Adige. There was news in Roveredo of the king's advance upon Rivoli; and Leone sat trying to lift and straighten out his wounded arm, with grimaces of laughter at the pain of the effort, which resolutely refused to acknowledge him to be an able combatant. At the carriage door Wilfrid bowed once over Vittoria's hand.

"You see that," Anna remarked to her sister.

"I should have despised him if he had acted indifferently," replied Lena.

She would have suspected him—that was what her heart meant; the artful show of indifference had deceived her once. The anger within her drew its springs much more fully from his refusal to respond to her affection, when she had in a fit of feminine weakness abased herself before him on the night of the Milanese revolt, than from the recollection of their days together in Meran. She had nothing of her sister's unforgivingness. And she was besides keenly curious to discover the nature of the charm Vittoria threw on him, and not on him solely. Vittoria left Wilfrid to better chances than she supposed. "Continue fighting with your army," she said, when they parted. The deeper shade which traversed his features told her that, if she pleased, her sway might still be active; but she had no emotion to spare for sentimental regrets. She asked herself whether a woman who has cast her lot in scenes of strife does not lose much of her womanhood and something of her truth; and while her imagination remained depressed, her answer was sad. In that mood she pitied Wilfrid with a reckless sense of her inability to repay him for the harm she had done him. The tragedies written in fresh blood all about her, together with that ever-present image of the fate of Italy hanging in the balance, soon drew her away from

personal reflections. She felt as one in a war-chariot, who has not time to cast more than a glance on the fallen. At the place where the ferry is, she was rejoiced by hearing positive news of the proximity of the Royal army. There were none to tell her that Charles Albert had here made his worst move by leaving Vicenza to the operations of the enemy, that he might become master of a point worthless when Vicenza fell into the enemy's hands. The old Austrian field-marshal had eluded him at Mantua on that very night when Vittoria had seen his troops in motion. The daring Austrian flank-march on Vicenza, behind the fortresses of the Quadrilateral, was the capital stroke of the campaign. But the presence of a Piedmontese vanguard at Rivoli flushed the Adige with confidence, and Vittoria went on her way sharing the people's delight. She reached Brescia to hear that Vicenza had fallen. The city was like a landscape smitten black by the thunder-cloud. Vittoria found Countess Ammiani at her husband's tomb, stiff and colourless and lifeless as a monument attached to the tomb.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CLOSE OF THE LOMBARD CAMPAIGN.—VITTORIA'S PERPLEXITY.

THE fall of Vicenza turned a tide that had overflowed its barriers with force enough to roll it to the Adriatic. From that day it was as if a violent wind blew east over Lombardy; flood and wind breaking here and there a tree, bowing everything before them. City, fortress, and battle-field resisted as the eddy whirls. Venice kept her brave colours streaming aloft in a mighty grasp despite the storm, but between Venice and Milan there was this unutterable devastation,—so sudden a change, so complete a reversal of the shield, that the Lombards were at first incredulous even in their agony, and set their faces against it as at a monstrous eclipse, as though the heavens were taking false oath of its being night when it was day. From Vicenza and Rivoli, to Sommacampagna,

and across Monte Godio to Custoza, to Volta on the right of the Mincio, up to the gates of Milan, the line of fire travelled, with a fantastic overbearing swiftness that, upon the map, looks like the zigzag elbowing of a field-rocket, if such a piece of description can be accepted. Vicenza fell on the 11th of June; the Austrians entered Milan on the 6th of August. Within that short time the Lombards were struck to the dust.

Countess Ammiani quitted Brescia for Bergamo before the worst had happened; when nothing but the king's retreat upon the Lombard capital, after the good fight at Volta, was known. According to the king's proclamation the Piedmontese army was to defend Milan, and hope was not dead. Vittoria succeeded in repressing all useless signs of grief in the presence of the venerable lady, who herself showed none, but simply recommended her accepted daughter to pray daily. "I can neither confess nor pray," Vittoria said to the priest, a comfortable, irritable ecclesiastic, long attached to the family, and little able to deal with this rebel before Providence, that would not let her swollen spirit be bled. Yet she admitted to him that the countess possessed resources which she could find nowhere; and she saw the full beauty of such inimitable grave endurance. Vit-

tor's foolish trick of thinking for herself made her believe, nevertheless, that the countess suffered more than she betrayed ; was less consoled than her spiritual comforter imagined. She continued obstinate and unrepentant, saying, "If my punishment is to come, it will at least bring experience with it, and I shall know why I am punished. The misery now is that I do not know, and do not see, the justice of the sentence."

Countess Ammiani thought better of her case than the priest did ; or she was more indulgent, or half indifferent. This girl was Carlo's choice ;—a strange choice, but the times were strange, and the girl was robust. The channels of her own and her husband's house were drying in all sides ; the house wanted re-suscitating. There was promise that the girl would bear children of strong blood. Countess Ammiani would not for one moment have allowed the spiritual welfare of the children to hang in dubitation, awaiting their experience of life ; but a certain satisfaction was shown in her faint smile when her confessor lamented over Vittoria's proud, stony state of moral revolt. She said to her accepted daughter, "I shall expect you to be prepared to espouse my son as soon as I have him by my side ;" nor did Vittoria's silent bowing of her face assure her that strict obedience

was implied. Precise words—"I will," and "I will not fail"—were exacted. The countess showed some emotion after Vittoria had spoken. "Now, may God end this war quickly, if it is to go against us," she exclaimed, trembling in her chair visibly a half-minute, with dropped eyelids and lips moving.

Carlo had sent word that he would join his mother as early as he was disengaged from active service, and meantime requested her to proceed to a villa on Lago Maggiore. Vittoria obtained permission from the countess to order the route of the carriage through Milan, where she wished to take up her mother and her maid Giacinta. For other reasons she would have avoided the city. The thought of entering it was painful with the shrewdest pain. Dante's profoundly human line seemed branded on the forehead of Milan.

The morning was dark when they drove through the streets of Bergamo. Passing one of the open places, Vittoria beheld a great concourse of volunteer youth and citizens, all of them listening to the voice of one who stood a few steps above them holding a banner. She gave an outcry of bitter joy. It was the Chief. On one side of him was Agostino, in the midst of memorable heads that were unknown to her. The countess refused to stay, though Vittoria strained

her hands together in extreme entreaty that she might for a few moments hear what the others were hearing. "I speak for my son, and I forbid it," Countess Ammiani said. Vittoria fell back and closed her eyes to cherish the vision. All those faces raised to the one speaker under the dark sky were beautiful. He had breathed some new glory of hope in them, making them shine beneath the overcast heavens, as when the sun breaks from an evening cloud and flushes the stems of a company of pine-trees.

Along the road to Milan she kept imagining his utterance until her heart rose with music. A delicious stream of music, thin as poor tears, passed through her frame, like a life reviving. She reached Milan in a mood to bear the idea of temporary defeat. Music had forsaken her so long that celestial reassurances seemed to return with it.

Her mother was at Zotti's, very querulous, but determined not to leave the house and the few people she knew. She had, as she told her daughter, fretted so much on her account that she hardly knew whether she was glad to see her. Tea, of course, she had given up all thoughts of; but now coffee was rising, and the boasted sweet bread of Lombardy was something to look at! She trusted that Emilia

would soon think of singing no more, and letting people rest: she might sing when she wanted money. A letter recently received from Mr. Pericles said that Italy was her child's ruin, and she hoped Emilia was ready to do as he advised, and hurry to England, where singing did not upset people, and people lived like real Christians, not—— Vittoria flapped her hand, and would not hear of the unchristianly crimes of the south. As regarded the expected defence of Milan, the little woman said that, if it brought on a bombardment, she would call it unpardonable wickedness, and only hoped that her daughter would repent.

Zotti stood by, interpreting the English to himself by tones. "The amiable donnina is not of our persuasion," he observed. "She remains dissatisfied with patriotic Milan. I have exhibited to her my dabs of bread through all the processes of making and baking. It is in vain. She rejects analogy. She is wilful as a principessina:—*'Tis so! 'tis not so! 'tis my will! be silent, thou!* Signora, I have been treated in that way by your excellent mother."

"Zotti has not been paid for three weeks, and he certainly has not mentioned it or looked it, I will say, Emilia."

"Zotti has had something to think of during the

last three weeks," said Vittoria, touching him kindly on the arm.

The confectioner lifted his fingers and his big brown eyes after them, expressive of the unutterable thoughts. He informed her that he had laid in a stock of flour, in the expectation that Carlo Alberto would defend the city. The Milanese were ready to aid him, though some, as Zotti confessed, had ceased to effervesce; and a great number who were perfectly ready to fight regarded his tardy appeal to Italian patriotism very coldly. Zotti set out in person to discover Giacinta. The girl could hardly fetch her breath when she saw her mistress. She was in Laura's service, and said that Laura had brought a wounded Englishman from the field of Custoza. Vittoria hurried to Laura, with whom she found Merthyr, blue-white as a corpse, having been shot through the body. His sister was in one of the Lombard hamlets, unaware of his fall; Beppo had been sent to her.

They noticed one another's embrowned complexions, but embraced silently. "Twice widowed!" Laura said when they sat together. Laura hushed all speaking of the war or allusion to a single incident of the miserable campaign, beyond the bare recital of Vittoria's adventures; yet when Vicenza

by chance was mentioned, she burst out: "They are not cities, they are living shrieks. They have been made impious for ever. Burn them to ashes, that they may not breathe foul upon heaven!" She had clung to the skirts of the army as far as the field of Custoza. "He," she said, pointing to the room where Merthyr lay,—“he groans less than the others I have nursed. Generally, when they looked at me, they appeared obliged to recollect that it was not I who had hurt them. Poor souls! some ended in great torment. I think of them as the happiest; for pain is a cloak that wraps you about, and I remember one middle-aged man who died softly at Custoza, and said, ‘Beaten!’ To take that thought as your travelling companion into the gulf, must be worse than dying of agony; at least, I think so.”

Vittoria was too well used to Laura's way of meeting disaster to expect from her other than this ironical fortitude, in which the fortitude leaned so much upon the irony. What really astonished her was the conception Laura had taken of the might of Austria. Laura did not directly speak of it, but shadowed it in allusive hints, much as if she had in her mind the image of an iron roller going over a field of flowers—hateful, imminent, irresistible. She felt as a leaf that has been flying before the gale.

Merthyr's wound was severe. Vittoria could not leave him. Her resolution to stay in Milan brought her into collision with Countess Ammiani, when the countess reminded her of her promise, sedately informing her that she was no longer her own mistress, and had a primary duty to fulfil. She offered to wait three days, or until the safety of the wounded man was medically certified to. It was incomprehensible to her that Vittoria should reject her terms; and though it was true that she would not have listened to a reason, she was indignant at not hearing one given in mitigation of the offence. She set out alone on her journey, deeply hurt. The reason was a feminine sentiment, and Vittoria was naturally unable to speak it. She shrank with pathetic horror from the thought of Merthyr's rising from his couch to find her a married woman, and desired most earnestly that her marriage should be witnessed by him. Young women will know how to reconcile the opposition of the sentiment. Had Merthyr been only slightly wounded, and sound enough to seem to be able to bear a bitter shock, she would not have allowed her personal feelings to cause chagrin to the noble lady. The sight of her dear steadfast friend prostrate in the cause of Italy, and who, if he lived to rise again, might not have

his natural strength to bear the thought of her loss with his old brave firmness, made it impossible for her to act decisively in one direct line of conduct.

Countess Ammiani wrote brief letters from Luino and Pallanza on Lago Maggiore. She said that Carlo was in the Como mountains; he would expect to find his bride, and would accuse his mother; "but his mother will be spared those reproaches," she added, "if the last shot fired kills, as it generally does, the bravest and the dearest."

"If it should!"—the thought rose on a quick breath in Vittoria's bosom, and the sentiment which held her away dispersed like a feeble smoke, and showed her another view of her features. She wept with longing for love and dependence. She was sick of personal freedom, tired of the exercise of her will, only too eager to give herself to her beloved. The blessedness of marriage, of peace and dependence, came on her imagination like a soft breeze from a hidden garden, like sleep. But this very longing created the resistance to it in the depths of her soul. There was a light as of reviving life, or of pain comforted, when it was she who was sitting by Merthyr's side; and when at times she saw the hopeless effort of his hand to reach to hers, or during the long still hours she laid her head on his pillow, and knew

that he breathed gratefully. The sweetness of helping him, and of making his breathing pleasant to him, closed much of the world which lay beyond her windows to her thoughts, and surprised her with an unknown emotion, so strange to her that when it first swept up her veins she had the fancy that she had been touched by a supernatural hand, and should have heard a flying accord of instruments. She was praying before she knew what prayer was. A crucifix hung over Merthyr's head. She had looked on it many times, and looked on it still, without seeing more than the old sorrow. In the night it was dim. She found herself trying to read the features of the thorn-crowned Head in the solitary night. She and it were alone with a life that was faint above the engulfing darkness. She prayed for the life, and trembled, and shed tears, and would have checked them; they seemed to be bearing away her little remaining strength. The tears streamed. No answer was given to her question, "Why do I weep?" She wept when Merthyr had passed the danger, as she had wept when the hours went by with shrouded visages; and though she felt the difference in the springs of her tears, she thought them but a simple form of weakness showing shade and light.

These tears were a vanward wave of the sea to

follow ; the rising of her voice to heaven was no more than a twitter of the earliest dawn before the coming of her soul's outcry.

"I have had a weeping fit," she thought, and resolved to remember it tenderly, as being associated with her friend's recovery, and a singular masterful power absolutely to look on the Austrians marching up the streets of Milan, and not to feel the surging hatred, or the nerveless despair, which she had supposed must be her alternatives.

It is a mean image to say that the entry of the Austrians into the reconquered city was like a river of oil permeating a lake of vinegar, but it presents the fact in every sense. They demanded nothing more than submission, and placed a gentle foot upon the fallen enemy ; and wherever they appeared they were isolated. The deepest wrath of the city was, nevertheless, not directed against them, but against Carlo Alberto, who had pledged his honour to defend it, and had forsaken it. Vittoria committed a public indiscretion on the day when the king left Milan to its fate : word whereof was conveyed to Carlo Ammiani, and he wrote to her.

"It is right that I should tell you what I have heard," the letter said. "I have heard that my bride drove up to the crowned traitor, after he had

unmasked himself, and when he was quitting the Greppi palace, and that she kissed his hand before the people—poor bleeding people of Milan! This is what I hear in the Val d’Intelvi:—that she despised the misery and just anger of the people, and, by virtue of her name [and mine, obtained a way for him. How can she have acted so as to give a colour to this infamous scandal? True or false, it does not affect my love for her. Still, my dearest, what shall I say? You keep me divided in two halves. My heart is out of me; and if I had a will, I think I should be harsh with you. You are absent from my mother at a time when we are about to strike another blow. Go to her. It is kindness; it is charity: I do not say duty. I remember that I did write harshly to you from Brescia. Then our march was so clear in view that a little thing ruffled me. Was it a little thing? But to applaud the Traitor now! To uphold him who has spilt our blood only to hand the country over to the old gaolers! He lent us his army like a Jew, for huge interest. Can you not read him? If not, cease, I implore you, to think at all for yourself.

“Is this a lover’s letter? I know that my beloved will see the love in it. To me your acts are fair and good as the chronicle of a saint. I find you creating suspicion—almost justifying it in others, and putting

your name in the mouth of a madman who denounces you. I shall not speak more of him. Remember that my faith in you is unchangeable, and I pray you to have the same in me.

"I sent you a greeting from the Chief. He marched in the ranks from Bergamo. I saw him on the line of march strip off his coat to shelter a young lad from the heavy rain. He is not discouraged; none are who have been near him.

"Angelo is here, and so is our Agostino; and I assure you he loads and fires a carbine much more deliberately than he composes a sonnet. I am afraid that your adored Antonio-Pericles fared badly among our fellows, but I could gather no particulars.

"Oh! the bright two minutes when I held you right in my heart. That spot on the Vicentino is alone unclouded. If I live I will have that bit of ground. I will make a temple of it. I could reach it blindfolded."

A townsman of Milan brought this letter to Vittoria. She despatched Luigi with her reply, which met the charge in a straightforward affirmative.

"I was driving to Zotti's by the Greppi palace, when I saw the king come forth, and the people hooted him. I stood up, and petitioned to kiss his

hand. The people knew me. They did not hoot any more for some time.

“So that you have heard the truth, and you must judge me by it. I cannot even add that I am sorry, though I strive to wish that I had not been present. I might wish it really, if I did not feel it to be a cowardly wish.

“Oh, my Carlo! my lover! my husband! you would not have me go against my nature? I have seen the king upon the battle-field. He has deigned to speak to me of Italy and our freedom. I have seen him facing our enemy; and to see him hooted by the people, and in misfortune and with sad eyes!—he looked sad and nothing else—and besides, I am sure I *know* the king. I mean that I understand him. I am half ashamed to write so boldly, even to you. I say to myself you should know *me*, at least; and if I am guilty of a piece of vanity, you should know that also. Carlo Alberto is quite unlike other men. He worships success as much; but they are not, as he is, so much bettered by adversity. *Indeed* I do not believe that he has exact *intentions* of any sort, or ever had the intention to betray us, or has done so in reality, that is, meaningly, of his own will. Count Medole and his party did, as you know, offer Lombardy to him, and Venice gave herself—brave,

noble Venice! Oh! if we two were there—Venice has England's sea-spirit. But did we not flatter the king? And ask yourself, my Carlo, could a king move in such an enterprise as a common person? Ought we not to be in union with Sardinia? How can we be if we reject her king? Is it not the only positive army that we can look to—I mean regular army? Should we not make some excuses for one who is not in our position?

“I feel that I push my questions like waves that fall and cannot get beyond—they crave so for answers agreeing to them. This should make me doubt myself, perhaps; but they crowd again, and seem so conclusive until I have written them down. I am unworthy to struggle with your intellect; but I say to myself, how unworthy of you I should be if I did not use my own, such as it is! The poor king had to conclude an armistice to save his little kingdom. Perhaps we ought to think of that sternly. My heart is filled with pity.

“It cannot but be right that you should know the worst of me. I call you my husband, and tremble to be permitted to lean my head on your bosom for hours, my sweet lover! And yet my cowardice, if I had let the king go by without a reverential greeting from me, in his adversity, would have rendered me

insufferable to myself. You are hearing me, and I am compelled to say, that rather than behave so basely I would forfeit your love, and be widowed till death should offer us for God to join us. Does your face change to me?

“Dearest, and I say it when the thought of you sets me almost swooning. I find my hands clasped, and I am muttering I know not what, and I am blushing. The ground seems to rock; I can barely breathe; my heart is like a bird caught in the hands of a cruel boy: it will not rest. I fear everything. I hear a whisper, *Delay not an instant!*’ and it is like a furnace; ‘*Hasten to him! Speed!*’ and I seem to totter forward and drop—I think I have lost you—I am like one dead.

“I remain here to nurse our dear friend Merthyr. For that reason I am absent from your mother. It is her desire that we should be married.

“Soon, soon, my own soul!

“I seem to be hanging on a tree for you, swayed by such a teasing wind.

“Oh, soon! or I feel that I shall hate any vestige of will that I have in this head of mine. Not in the heart—it is not there!

“And sometimes I am burning to sing. The voice

leaps to my lips ; it is quite like a thing that lives apart—my prisoner.

“It is true, Laura is here with Merthyr.

“Could you come at once?—not here, but to Pallanza? We shall both make our mother happy. This she wishes, this she lives for, this consoles her—and oh, this gives me peace! Yes, Merthyr is recovering! I can leave him without the dread I had; and Laura confesses to the feminine sentiment, if her funny jealousy of a rival nurse is really simply feminine. She will be glad of our resolve, I am sure. And then you will order all my actions; and I shall be certain that they are such as I would proudly call mine; and I shall be shut away from the world. Yes; let it be so! Addio. I reserve all sweet names for you. Addio. In Pallanza:—no not Pallanza—Paradise!

“Hush! and do not smile at me:—it was not my *will*, I discover, but my *want of will*, that distracted me.

“See my last signature of—not Vittoria; for I may sign that again and still be Emilia Alessandra Ammiani—

“SANDRA BELLONI.”

The letter was sealed; Luigi bore it away, and a brief letter to Countess Ammiani, in Pallanza, as well.

Vittoria was relieved of her anxiety concerning Merthyr by the arrival of Georgiana, who had been compelled to make her way round by Piacenza and Turin, where she had left Gambier, with Beppo in attendance on him. Georgiana at once assumed all the duties of head-nurse, and the more resolutely because of her brother's evident moral weakness in sighing for the hand of a fickle girl to smoothe his pillow. "When he is stronger you can sit beside him a little," she said to Vittoria, who surrendered her post without a struggle, and rarely saw him, though Laura told her that his frequent exclamation was her name, accompanied by a soft look at his sister—"which would have stirred my heart like poor old Milan last March," Laura added, with a lift of her shoulders.

Georgiana's icy manner appeared infinitely strange to Vittoria when she heard from Merthyr that his sister had become engaged to Captain Gambier.

"Nothing softens these women," said Laura, putting Georgiana in a class.

"I wish you could try the effect of your winning Merthyr," Vittoria suggested.

"I remember that when I went to my husband, I likewise wanted every woman of my acquaintance to be married." Laura sighed deeply. "What is this

poor withered body of mine now ? It feels like an old volcano, *cindery*, with fire somewhere :—a charming bride ! My dear, if I live till my children make me a grandmother, I shall look on the love of men and women as a toy that I have played with. A new husband ? I must be dragged through the Circles of Dante before I can conceive it, and then I should loathe the stranger.”

News came that the volunteers were crushed. It was time for Vittoria to start for Pallanza, and she thought of her leave-taking ; a final leave-taking, in one sense, to the friends who had cared too much for her. Laura delicately drew Georgiana aside in the sick-room, which she would not quit, and alluded to the necessity for Vittoria’s departure without stating exactly wherefore : but Georgiana was a Welsh-woman. Partly to show her accurate power of guessing, and chiefly that she might reprove Laura’s insulting whisper, which outraged and irritated her as much as if “ Oh ! your poor brother ! ” had been exclaimed, she made display of Merthyr’s manly coldness by saying aloud, “ You mean, that she is going to her marriage.” Laura turned her face towards Merthyr. He had striven to rise on his elbow, and had dropped flat in his helplessness. Big tears were rolling down his cheeks. His articulation

failed him, beyond a reiterated "No, no," pitiful to hear, and he broke into childish sobs. Georgiana hurried Laura from the room. By-and-by the doctor was promptly summoned, and it was Georgiana herself, miserably humbled, who obtained Vittoria's sworn consent to keep the life in Merthyr by lingering yet awhile.

Meantime Luigi brought a letter from Pallanza in Carlo's handwriting. This was the burden of it:—

"I am here, and you are absent. Hasten!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A FRESH ENTANGLEMENT.

THE Lenkenstein ladies returned to Milan proudly in the path of the army which they had followed along the city walls on the black March midnight. The ladies of the Austrian aristocracy generally had to be exiles from Vienna, and were glad to flock together even in an alien city. Anna and Lena were aware of Vittoria's residence in Milan, through the interchange of visits between the Countess of Lenkenstein and her sister Signora Piaveni. They heard also of Vittoria's prospective and approaching marriage to Count Ammiani. The Duchess of Graättli, who had forborne a visit to her unhappy friends, lest her Austrian face should wound their sensitiveness, was in company with the Lenkensteins one day, when Irma di Karski called on them. Irma had come from Lago Maggiore, where she had

left her patron, as she was pleased to term Antonio-Pericles. She was full of chatter of that most worthy man's deplorable experiences of Vittoria's behaviour to him during the war, and of many things besides. According to her account, Vittoria had enticed him from place to place with promises that the next day, and the next day, and the day after, she would be ready to keep her engagement to go to London, and at last she had given him the slip and left him to be plucked like a pullet by a horde of volunteer banditti, out of whose hands Antonio-Pericles—"one of our richest millionaires in Europe, certainly our richest amateur," said Irma—escaped in fit outward condition for the garden of Eden.

Count Karl was lying on the sofa, and went into endless invalid's laughter at the picture presented by Irma of the 'wild-man' wanderings of poor infatuated Pericles, which was exaggerated, though not intentionally, for Irma repeated the words and gestures of Pericles in the recital of his tribulations. Being of a somewhat similar physical organization, she did it very laughably. Irma declared that Pericles was cured of his infatuation. He had got to Turin, intending to quit Italy for ever, when—"he met me," said Irma, modestly.

“And heard that the war was at an end,” Count Karl added.

“And he has taken the superb Villa Ricciardi, on Lago Maggiore, where he will have a troupe of singers, and perform operas, in which I believe I may possibly act as prima donna. The truth is, I would do anything to prevent him from leaving the country.”

But Irma had more to say, and “I bear no malice,” she commenced it. The story she had heard was that Count Ammiani, after plighting himself to a certain signorina, known as Vittoria Campa, had received tidings that she was one of those persons who bring discredit on Irma’s profession. “Gifted by nature, I can acknowledge,” said Irma; “but devoured by vanity—a perfect slave to the appetite for praise; ready to forfeit anything for flattery! Poor signor Antonio-Pericles!—he knows her.” And now Count Ammiani, persuaded to reason by his mother, had given her up. There was nothing more positive, for Irma had seen him in the society of Countess Violetta d’Isorella.

Anna and Lena glanced at their brother Karl.

“I should not allude to what is not notorious,” Irma pursued. “They are always together. My dear Antonio-Pericles is most amusing in his expressions

of delight at it. For my part, though she served me an evil turn once,—you will hardly believe, ladies, that in her jealousy of me she was guilty of the most shameful machinations to get me out of the way on the night of the first performance of *Camilla*,—but, for my part, I bear no malice. The creature is an inveterate rebel, and I dislike her for that, I do confess.”

“The signorina Vittoria Campa is my particular and very dear friend,” said the duchess.

“She is not the less an inveterate rebel,” said Anna.

“Alas, that she should have brought discredit on Fräulein di Karski’s profession!” Count Karl gave a long-drawn sigh.

The duchess hurried straightway to Laura, with whom was Count Serabiglione, reviewing the present posture of affairs from the condescending altitudes of one that has foretold it. Laura and Amalia embraced and went apart. During their absence Vittoria came down to the count and listened to a familiar illustration of his theory of the relations which should exist between Italy and Austria, derived from the friendship of those two women.

“What I wish you to see, signorina, is that such an alliance is possible; and, if we supply the brains, as we do, is by no means likely to be degrading. These

bears are absolutely on their knees to us for good fellowship. You have influence, you have amazing wit, you have unparalleled beauty, and, let me say it with the utmost sadness, you have now had experience. Why will you not recognise facts? It is as though the ground should revolt against the house being built on it;—and earthquakes are not common. They are not good things to entreat high Heaven to bestow on us. Of what avail is this one voice of mine? I speak—who listens? Italian unity! I have exposed the fatuity—who listens? Italian freedom! It is a bed of reeds, with the nest of a wild swan! Do you not, signorina, with your overpowering imagination, conceive the picture? A wind comes, and the reeds all try to lean together, and up goes our swan and sings a death-song; and another wind blows the reeds another way. But I drop comparisons—they are for poets, *farceurs*. All similes followed out are mazes: they bring us back to our own face in the glass. I do not attempt to reason with my daughter. She is pricked by an envenomed fly of Satan. Yet, behold her and the duchess! It is the very union I preach; and I am, I declare to you, signorina, in great danger. I feel it, but I persist. I am in danger” (Count Serabiglione bowed his head low) “of the transcendent sin of scorn of my species.”

The little nobleman swayed deplorably in his chair. "Nothing is so perilous for a soul's salvation as that. The one sane among madmen! The one whose reason is left to him among thousands who have forsaken it! I beg you to realize the idea. The Emperor, as I am given to understand, is about to make public admission of my services. I shall be all the more hated. Yet it is a considerable gain. I do not deny that I esteem it as a promotion for my services. I shall not be the first martyr in this world, signorina."

Count Serabiglione produced a martyr's smile.

"The profits of my expected posts will be," he was saying, with a reckoning eye cast upward into his cranium for accuracy, when Laura returned, and Vittoria ran out to the duchess. Amalia repeated Irma's tattle. A curious little twitching of the brows at Violetta d'Isorella's name marked the reception of it.

"She is most lovely," Vittoria said.

"And absolutely reckless."

"She is an old friend of Count Ammiani's."

"And you have an old friend here. But the old friend of a young woman—I need not say further than that it is different."

The duchess used the privilege of her affection,

and urged Vittoria not to trifle with her lover's impatience.

Admitted to the chamber where Merthyr lay, she was enabled to make allowance for her irresolution. The face of the wounded man was like a lake-water taking light from Vittoria's presence.

"This may go on for weeks," she said to Laura.

Three days later, Vittoria received an order from the Government to quit the city within a prescribed number of hours, and her brain was racked to discover why Laura appeared so little indignant at the barbarous act of despotism. Laura undertook to break the bad news to Merthyr. The parting was as quiet and cheerful as, in the opposite degree, Vittoria had thought it would be melancholy and regretful. "What a Government!" Merthyr said, and told her to let him hear of any changes. "All changes for the better are welcome to me. All changes that please my friends please me."

Vittoria kissed his forehead with one grateful murmur of farewell to the bravest heart she had ever known. The going to her happiness seemed more like going to something fatal until she reached the Lago Maggiore. There she saw September beauty, and felt as if the splendour encircling her were her bridal decoration. But no bridegroom stood

to greet her on the terrace-steps between the potted orange and citron trees. Countess Ammiani extended kind hands to her at arms' length.

"You have come," she said. "I hope that it is not too late."

Vittoria was a week without sight of her lover ; nor did Countess Ammiani attempt to explain her words, or speak of other than common daily things. In body and soul Vittoria had taken a chill. The silent blame resting on her in this house called up her pride, so that she would not ask any questions ; and when Carlo came, she wanted warmth to melt her. Their meeting was that of two passionless creatures. Carlo kissed her loyally, and courteously inquired after her health and the health of friends in Milan, and then he rallied his mother. Agostino had arrived with him, and the old man, being in one of his soft moods, unvexed by his conceits, Vittoria had some comfort from him of a dull kind. She heard Carlo telling his mother that he must go in the morning. Agostino replied to her quick look at him, "I stay ;" and it seemed like a little saved from the wreck, for she knew that she could speak to Agostino as she could not to the countess. When his mother prepared to retire, Carlo walked over to his bride, and repeated rapidly and brightly his inquiries after

friends in Milan. She, with a pure response to his natural-unnatural manner, spoke of Merthyr Powys chiefly : to which he said several times, "Dear fellow!" and added, "I shall always love Englishmen for his sake."

This gave her one throb, "I could not leave him, Carlo."

"Certainly not, certainly not," said Carlo. "I should have been happy to wait on him myself. I was busy. I am still. I dare say you have guessed that I have a new journal in my head : the *Pallanza Iris* is to be the name of it ;—to be printed in three colours, to advocate three principles, in three styles. The Legitimists, the Moderates, and the Republicans are to proclaim themselves in its columns in prose, poetry, and hotch-potch. Once an editor, always an editor. The authorities suspect that something of the sort is about to be planted, so I can only make occasional visits here :—therefore, as you will believe,"—Carlo let his voice fall—"I have good reason to hate them still. They may cease to persecute me soon."

He insisted upon lighting his mother to her room. Vittoria and Agostino sat talking of the Chief and the minor events of the war—of Luciano, Marco, Giulio, and Ugo Corte—till the conviction fastened

on them that Carlo would not return, when Agostino stood up and said, yawning wearily, "I'll talk further to you, my child, to-morrow."

She begged that it might be now.

"No; to-morrow," said he.

"Now, now!" she reiterated, and brought down a reproof from his forefinger.

"The poetic definition of 'now' is that it is a small boat, my daughter, in which the female heart is constantly pushing out to sea and sinking. 'To-morrow' is an island in the deeps, where grain grows. When I land you there, I will talk to you."

She knew that he went to join Carlo after he had quitted her.

Agostino was true to his promise next day. He brought her nearer to what she had to face, though he did not help her vision much. Carlo had gone before sunrise.

They sat on the terrace above the lake, screened from the sunlight by thick myrtle bushes. Agostino smoked his loosely-rolled cigarettes, and Vittoria sipped chocolate and looked upward to the summit of the Motterone, with many thoughts and images in her mind.

He commenced by giving her a love-message from Carlo. "Hold fast to it that he means it: conduct

is never a straight index where the heart's involved," said the chuckling old man; "or it is not in times like ours. You have been in the wrong, and your having a good excuse will not help you before the deciding fates. Woman that you are! did you not think that because we were beaten we were going to rest for a very long while, and that your Carlo of yesterday was going to be your Carlo of to-day?"

Vittoria tacitly confessed to it.

"Ay," he pursued, "when you wrote to him in the Val d'Intelvi, you supposed you had only to say, 'I am ready,' which was then the case. You made your summer and left the fruits to hang, and now you are astounded that seasons pass and fruits drop. You should have come to this place, if but for a pair of days, and so have fixed one matter in the chapter. This is how the chapter has run on. I see I talk to a stunned head; you are thinking that Carlo's love for you can't have changed; and it has not, but occasion has gone and *times* have changed. Now listen. The countess desired the marriage. Carlo could not go to you in Milan with the sword in his hand. Therefore you had to come to him. He waited for you, perhaps for his own preposterous lover's sake as much as to make his mother's heart easy. If she loses him she loses everything, unless he leaves a wife to her

care and the hope that her House will not be extinct, which is possibly not much more the weakness of old aristocracy than of human nature.

“Meantime, his brothers-in-arms were broken up and entered Piedmont, and he remained waiting for you still. You are thinking that he had not waited a month. But if four months finished Lombardy, less than one month is quite sufficient to do the same for us little beings. He met the Countess d’Isorella here. You have to thank her for seeing him at all, so don’t wrinkle your forehead yet. Luciano Romara is drilling his men in Piedmont; Angelo Guidascarpì has gone there. Carlo was considering it his duty to join Luciano, when he met this lady, and she has apparently succeeded in altering his plans. Luciano and his band will go to Rome. Carlo fancies that another blow will be struck for Lombardy. This lady should know; the point is, whether she can be trusted. She persists in declaring that Carlo’s duty is to remain, and—I cannot tell how, for I am as a child among women—she has persuaded him of her sincerity. Favour me now with your clearest understanding, and deliver it from feminine sensations of any description for just two minutes.”

Agostino threw away the end of a cigarette and looked for firmness in Vittoria’s eyes.

“This Countess d’Isorella is opposed to Carlo’s marriage at present. She says that she is betraying the king’s secrets, and has no reliance on a woman. As a woman you will pardon her, for it is the language of your sex. You are also denounced by Barto Rizzo, a madman—he went mad as fire, and had to be chained at Varese. In some way or other Countess d’Isorella got possession of him; she has managed to subdue him. A sword-cut he received once in Verona has undoubtedly affected his brain, or caused it to be affected under strong excitement. He is at her villa, and she says—perhaps with some truth—that Carlo would in several ways lose his influence by his immediate marriage with you. The reason must have weight; otherwise he would fulfil his mother’s principal request, and be at the bidding of his own desire. There; I hope I have spoken plainly.”

Agostino puffed a sigh of relief at the conclusion of his task.

Vittoria had been too strenuously engaged in defending the steadiness of her own eyes to notice the shadow of an assumption of frankness in his.

She said that she understood.

She got away to her room like an insect carrying a load thrice its own size. All that she could really

gather from Agostino's words was, that she felt herself rocking in a tower, and that Violetta d'Isorella was beautiful. She had striven hard to listen to him with her wits alone, and her sensations subsequently revenged themselves in this fashion. The tower rocked and struck a bell that she discovered to be her betraying voice uttering cries of pain. She was for hours incapable of meeting Agostino again. His delicate intuition took the harshness off the meeting. He led her even to examine her state of mind, and to discern the fancies from the feelings by which she was agitated. He said shrewdly and bluntly, "You can master pain, but not doubt. If you show a sign of unhappiness, remember that I shall know you doubt both what I have told you, and Carlo as well."

Vittoria fenced: "But is there such a thing as happiness?"

"I should imagine so," said Agostino, touching her cheek, "and slipperiness likewise. There's patience at any rate; only you must dig for it. You arrive at nothing, but the eternal digging constitutes the object gained. I recollect when I was a raw lad, full of ambition, in love, and without a franc in my pockets, one night in Paris, I found myself looking up at a street lamp; there was a moth in it. He

couldn't get out, so he had very little to trouble his conscience. I think he was near happiness: he ought to have been happy. My luck was not so good, or you wouldn't see me still alive, my dear."

Vittoria sighed for a plainer speaker.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ON LAGO MAGGIORE.

CARLO'S hours were passed chiefly across the lake, in the Piedmontese valleys. When at Pallanza he was restless, and he shunned the two or three minutes of privacy with his betrothed which the rigorous Italian laws besetting courtship might have allowed him to take. He had perpetually the look of a man starting from wine. It was evident that he and Countess d'Isorella continued to hold close communication, for she came regularly to the villa to meet him. On these occasions Countess Ammiani accorded her one ceremonious interview, and straightway locked herself in her room. Violetta's grace of ease and vivacity soared too high to be subject to any hostile judgment of her character. She seemed to rely entirely on the force of her beauty, and to care little for those who did not acknowledge it. She accepted

public compliments quite royally, nor was Agostino backward in offering them. "And you have a voice, you know," he sometimes said aside to Vittoria; but she had forgotten how easily she could swallow great praise of her voice; she had almost forgotten her voice. Her delight was to hang her head above inverted mountains in the lake, and dream that she was just something better than the poorest of human creatures. She could not avoid putting her mind in competition with this brilliant woman's, and feeling eclipsed; and her weakness became pitiable. But Countess d'Isorella mentioned once that Pericles was at the Villa Ricciardi, projecting magnificent operatic entertainments. The reviving of a passion to sing possessed Vittoria like a thirst for freedom, and instantly confused all the reflected images within her, as the fury of a sudden wind from the high Alps scourges the glassy surface of the lake. She begged Countess Ammiani's permission that she might propose to Pericles to sing in his private operatic company, in any part, at the shortest notice.

"You wish to leave me?" said the countess, and resolutely conceived it.

Speaking to her son on this subject, she thought it necessary to make some excuse for a singer's instinct, who really did not live save on the stage. It

amused Carlo ; he knew that his mother was really angry with persons she tried to shield from the anger of others ; and her not seeing the wrong on his side in his behaviour towards his betrothed was laughable. Nevertheless she had divined the case more correctly than he : the lover was hurt. After what he had endured, he supposed, with all his forgiveness, that he had an illimitable claim upon his bride's patience. He told his mother to speak to her openly.

“ Why not you, my Carlo ? ” said the countess.

“ Because, mother, if I speak to her, I shall end by throwing out my arms and calling for the priest.”

“ I would clap hands to that.”

“ We will see ; it may be soon or late, but it can't be now.”

“ How much am I to tell her, Carlo ? ”

“ Enough to keep her from fretting.”

The countess then asked herself how much she knew. Her habit of receiving her son's word and will as supreme kept her ignorant of anything beyond the outline of his plans ; and being told to speak openly of them to another, she discovered that her acquiescing imagination supplied the chief part of her knowledge. She was ashamed also to have it thought, even by Carlo, that she had not

gathered every detail of his occupation, so that she could not argue against him, and had to submit to see her dearest wishes lightly swept aside.

"I beg you to tell me what you think of Countess d'Isorella; not the afterthought," she said to Vittoria.

"She is beautiful, dear Countess Ammiani."

"Call me mother now and then. Yes; she is beautiful. She has a bad name."

"Envy must have given it, I think."

"Of course she provokes envy. But I say that her name is bad, as envy could not make it. She is a woman who goes on missions, and carries a husband into society like a passport. You have only thought of her beauty?"

"I can see nothing else," said Vittoria, whose torture at the sight of the beauty was appeased by her disingenuous pleading on its behalf.

"In my time Beauty was a sinner," the countess resumed. "My confessor has filled my ears with warnings that it is a net to the soul, a weapon for devils. May the saints of Paradise make bare the beauty of this woman. She has persuaded Carlo that she is serving the country. You have let him lie here alone in a fruitless bed, silly girl. He stayed for you while his comrades called him to Vercelli,

where they are assembled. The man whom he salutes as his chief gave him word to go there. They are bound for Rome. Ah me! Rome is a great name, but Lombardy is Carlo's natal home, and Lombardy bleeds. You were absent—how long you were absent! If you could know the heaviness of those days of his waiting for you. And it was I who kept him here! I must have omitted a prayer, for he would have been at Vercelli now with Luciano and Emilio, and you might have gone to him; but he met this woman, who has convinced him that Piedmont will make a winter march, and that his marriage must be delayed." The countess raised her face and drooped her hands from the wrists, exclaiming, "If I have lately omitted one prayer, enlighten me, blessed Heaven! I am blind; I cannot see for my son; I am quite blind. I do not love the woman; therefore I doubt myself. You, my daughter, tell me your thought of her, tell me what you think. Young eyes observe; young heads are sometimes shrewd in guessing."

Vittoria said, after a pause, "I will believe her to be true, if she supports the king." It was hardly truthful speaking on her part.

"How can Carlo have been persuaded!" the countess sighed.

“By me?” Vittoria asked herself, and for a moment she was exulting.

She spoke from that emotion when it had ceased to animate her.

“Carlo was angry with the king. He echoed Agostino, but Agostino does not sting as he did, and Carlo cannot avoid seeing what the king has sacrificed. Perhaps the Countess d’Isorella has shown him promises of fresh aid in the king’s handwriting. Suffering has made Carlo Alberto one with the Republicans, if he had other ambitions once. And Carlo dedicates his blood to Lombardy: he does rightly. Dear countess—my mother! I have made him wait for me; I will be patient in waiting for him. I know that Countess d’Isorella is intimate with the king. There is a man named Barto Rizzo, who thinks me a guilty traitress, and she is making use of this man. That must be her reason for prohibiting the marriage. She cannot be false if she is capable of uniting extreme revolutionary agents and the king in one plot, I think; I do not know.” Vittoria concluded her perfect expression of confidence with this atoning doubtfulness.

Countess Ammiani obtained her consent that she would not quit her side.

After Violetta had gone, Carlo, though he shunned

secret interviews, addressed his betrothed as one who was not strange to his occupation, and the trial his heart was undergoing. She could not doubt that she was beloved, in spite of the colourlessness and tonelessness of a love that appealed to her intellect. He showed her a letter he had received from Laura, laughing at its abuse of Countess d'Isorella, and the sarcasms levelled at himself.

In this letter Laura said that she was engaged in something besides nursing.

Carlo pointed his finger to the sentence, and remarked, "I must have your promise—a word from you is enough—that you will not meddle with any intrigue."

Vittoria gave the promise, half trusting it to bring the lost bloom of their love to him; but he received it as a plain matter of necessity. Certain of his love, she wondered painfully that it should continue so barren of music.

"Why am I to pledge myself that I will be useless?" she asked. "You mean, my Carlo, that I am to sit still, and watch, and wait."

He answered, "I will tell you this much: I can be struck vitally through you. In the game I am playing, I am able to defend myself. If you enter it, distraction begins. Stay with my mother."

“Am I to know nothing?”

“Everything—in good time.”

“I might—might I not help you, my Carlo?”

“Yes; and nobly too. And I show you the way.”

Agostino and Carlo made an expedition to Turin. Before he went, Carlo took her in his arms.

“Is it coming?” she said, shutting her eyelids like a child expecting the report of firearms.

He pressed his lips to the closed eyes. “Not yet; but are you growing timid?”

His voice seemed to reprove her.

She could have told him that keeping her in the dark among unknown terrors ruined her courage; but the minutes were too precious, his touch too sweet. In eyes and hands he had become her lover again. The blissful minutes rolled away like waves that keep the sunshine out at sea.

Her solitude in the villa was beguiled by the arrival of the score of an operatic scena, entitled “HAGAR,” by Rocco Ricci, which she fancied that either Carlo or her dear old master had sent, and she devoured it. She thought it written expressly for her. With HAGAR she communed during the long hours, and sang herself on towards the verge of an imagined desert beyond the mountain-shadowed lake and the last view of her beloved Motterone.

Hagar's face of tears in the Brera was known to her; and Hagar in her 'Addio' gave the living voice to that dumb one. Vittoria revelled in the delicious vocal misery. She expanded with the sorrow of poor Hagar, whose tears refreshed her, and parted her from her recent narrowing self-consciousness. The great green mountain fronted her like a living presence. Motterone supplied the place of the robust and venerable patriarch, whom she reproached, and worshipped, but with a fathomless burdensome sense of cruel injustice, deeper than the tears or the voice which spoke of it: a feeling of subjected love that was like a mother's giving suck to a detested child. Countess Ammiàni saw the abrupt alteration of her step and look with a dim surprise. "What do you conceal from me?" she asked, and supplied the answer by charitably attributing it to news that the signora Piaveni was coming.

When Laura came, the countess thanked her, saying—"I am a wretched companion for [this boiling head."

Laura soon proved to her that she had been the best, for after very few hours Vittoria was looking like the Hagar on the canvas.

A woman such as Violetta d'Isorella was of the sort from which Laura shrank with all her feminine

power of loathing ; but she spoke of her with some effort at personal tolerance until she heard of Violetta's stipulation for the deferring of Carlo's marriage, and contrived to guess that Carlo was reserved and unfamiliar with his betrothed. Then she cried out, "Fool that he is! Is it ever possible to come to the end of the folly of men? She has inflamed his vanity. She met him when you were holding him waiting, and no doubt she commenced with lamentations over the country, followed by a sigh, a fixed look, a cheerful air, and the assurance to him that she *knew* it—uttered as if through the keyhole of the royal cabinet—she knew that Sardinia would break the Salasco armistice in a month :—if only, *if* the king could be sure of support from the youth of Lombardy."

"Do you suspect the unhappy king?" Vittoria interposed.

"Grasp your colours tight," said Laura, nodding sarcastic approbation of such fidelity, and smiling slightly. "There has been no mention of the king. Countess d'Isorella is a spy and a tool of the Jesuits, taking pay from all parties—Austrian as well, I would swear. Their object is to paralyse the march on Rome, and she has won Carlo for them. I am told that Barto Rizzo is another of her conquests.

Thus she has a madman and a fool, and what may not be done with a madman and a fool ! However, I have set a watch on her. She must have inflamed Carlo's vanity. He has it, just as they all have. There's trickery : I would rather behold the boy charging at the head of a column than putting faith in this base creature. She must have simulated well," Laura went on talking to herself.

"What trickery?" said Vittoria.

"He was in love with the woman when he was a lad," Laura replied, and pertinently to Vittoria's feelings. This threw the moist shade across her features.

Beppo in Turin and Luigi on the lake were the watch set on Countess d'Isorella ; they were useless save to fortify Laura's suspicions. The Duchess of Graätli wrote mere gossip from Milan. She mentioned that Anna of Lenkenstein had visited with her the tomb of her brother, Count Paul, at Bologna, and had returned in double mourning ; and that Madame Sedley—"the sister of our poor ruined Pierson"—had obtained grace, for herself at least, from Anna, by casting herself at Anna's feet, and that they were now friends.

Vittoria felt ashamed of Adela.

When Carlo returned, the signora attacked him

boldly with all her weapons ; reproached him ; said, "Would my husband have treated me in such a manner?" Carlo twisted his moustache and stroked his young beard for patience. They passed from room to balcony and terrace, and Laura brought him back into company without cessation of her fire of questions and sarcasms, saying, "No, no ; we will speak of these things publicly." She appealed alternately to Agostino, Vittoria, and Countess Ammiani for support, and as she certainly spoke sense, Carlo was reduced to gloom and silence. Laura then paused. "Surely you have punished your bride enough?" she said ; and more softly, "Brother of my Giacomo ! you are under an evil spell."

Carlo started up in anger. Bending to Vittoria, he offered her his hand to lead her out. They went together.

"A good sign," said the countess.

"A bad sign !" Laura sighed. "If he had taken *me* out for explanation ! But tell me, my Agostino, are you the woman's dupe?"

"I have been," Agostino admitted frankly.

"You did really put faith in her?"

"She condescends to be so excessively charming."

"You could not advance a better reason."

“It is one of our best; perhaps our very best, where your sex is concerned, signora.”

“You are her dupe no more?”

“No more. Oh, dear, no!”

“You understand her now, do you?”

“For the very reason, signora, that I have been her dupe. That is I am beginning to understand her. I am not yet in possession of the key.

“Not yet in possession!” said Laura contemptuously; “but, never mind. Now for Carlo.”

“Now for Carlo. He declares that he never has been deceived by her.”

“He is perilously vain,” sighed the signora.

“Seriously”—Agostino drew out the length of his beard—“I do not suppose that he has been—boys, you know, are so acute. He fancies he can make her of service, and he shows some skill.”

“The skill of a fish to get into the net!”

“My dearest signora, you do not allow for the times. I remember”—Agostino peered upward through his eyelashes in a way that he had—“I remember seeing in a meadow a gossamer running away with a spider-thread. It was against all calculation. But, observe: there were exterior agencies at work: a stout wind blew. The ordinary reckoning is based on calms. Without the operation of dis-

turbing elements, the spider-thread would have gently detained the gossamer."

"Is that meant for my son?" Countess Ammiani asked slowly, with incredulous emphasis.

Agostino and Laura, laughing in their hearts at the mother's mysterious veneration for Carlo, had to explain that 'gossamer' was a poetic, generic term, to embrace the lighter qualities of masculine youth.

A woman's figure passed swiftly by the window, which led Laura to suppose that the couple outside had parted. She ran forth, calling to one of them, but they came hand in hand, declaring that they had seen neither woman nor man. "And I am happy," Vittoria whispered. She looked happy, pale though she was.

"It is only my dreadful longing for rest which makes me pale," she said to Laura, when they were alone. "Carlo has proved to me that he is wiser than I am."

"A proof that you love Carlo, perhaps," Laura rejoined.

"Dearest, he speaks more gently of the king."

"It may be cunning, or it may be carelessness."

"Will nothing satisfy you, wilful sceptic? He is quite alive to the Countess d'Isorella's character. He told me how she dazzled him once."

“Not how she has entangled him now?”

“It is not true. He told me what I should like to dream over without talking any more to anybody. Ah, what a delight! to have known him, as you did, when he was a boy. Can one who knew him then mean harm to him? I am not capable of imagining it. No; he will not abandon poor broken Lombardy, and he is right; and it is my duty to sit and wait. No shadow shall come between us. He has said it, and I have said it. We have but one thing to fear, which is contemptible to fear; so I am at peace.”

“Love-sick,” was Laura’s mental comment. Yet when Carlo explained his position to her next day, she was milder in her condemnation of him, and even admitted that a man must be guided by such brains as he possesses. He had conceived that his mother had a right to claim one month from him at the close of the war; he said this reddening: Laura nodded. He confessed that he was irritated when he met the Countess d’Isorella, with whom, to his astonishment, he found Barto Rizzo. She had picked him up, weak from a paroxysm, on the highroad to Milan. “And she tamed the brute,” said Carlo, in admiration of her ability; “she saw that he was *plot mad*, and she set him at work on a stupendous plot; agents running nowhere, and scribblings centering in her work-

basket. You smile at me, as if I were a similar patient, signora. But I am my own agent. I have personally seen all my men in Turin and elsewhere. Violetta has not one grain of love for her country; but she can be made to serve it. As for me, I have gone too far to think of turning aside and drilling with Luciano. He may yet be diverted from Rome, to strike another blow for Lombardy. The Chief, I know, has some religious sentiment about Rome. So might I have; it is the Head of Italy. Let us raise the body first. And we have been beaten here. Great gods! we will have another fight for it on the same spot, and quickly. Besides, I cannot face Luciano and tell him why I was away from him in the dark hour. How can I tell him that I was lingering to bear a bride to the altar? while he and the rest—poor fellows! Hard enough to have to mention it to you, signora!”

She understood his boyish sense of shame. Making smooth allowances for a feeling natural to his youth and the circumstances, she said, “I am your sister, for you were my husband’s brother-in-arms, Carlo. We two speak heart to heart: I sometimes fancy you have that voice: you hurt me with it more than you know; gladden me too! My Carlo, I wish to hear why Countess d’Isorella objects to your marriage.”

"She does not object."

"An answer that begins by quibbling is not propitious. She opposes it."

"For this reason: you have not forgotten the bronze butterfly?"

"I see more clearly," said Laura, with a start.

"There appears to be no cure for the brute's mad suspicion of her," Carlo pursued; "and he is powerful among the Milanese. If my darling takes my name, he can damage much of my influence, and—you know what there is to be dreaded from a fanatic."

Laura nodded, as if in full agreement with him, and said, after meditating a minute, "What sort of a lover is this!" She added a little laugh to the singular interjection.

"Yes, I have also thought of a secret marriage," said Carlo, stung by her penetrating instinct so that he was enabled to read the meaning in her mind.

"The best way, when you are afflicted by a dilemma of such a character, my Carlo," the signora looked at him, "is to take a chess-table and make your moves on it. 'King—my duty;' 'queen—my passion;' 'bishop—my social obligation;' 'knight—my what-you-will and my round-the-corner wishes.' Then, if you find that queen may be gratified without

endangering king, and so forth, why, you may follow your inclinations; and if not, not. My Carlo, you are either enviably cool, or you are an enviable hypocrite."

"The matter is not quite so easily settled as that," said Carlo.

On the whole, though against her preconception, Laura thought him an honest lover, and not the player of a double game. She saw that Vittoria should have been with him in the critical hour of defeat, when his passions were down, and heaven knows what weakness of our common manhood, that was partly pride, partly love-craving, made his nature waxen to every impression; a season, as Laura knew, when the mistress of a loyal lover should not withhold herself from him. A nature tender like Carlo's, and he bearing an enamoured heart, could not, as Luciano Romara had done, pass instantly from defeat to drill. And vain as Carlo was (the vanity being most intricate and subtle, like a nervous fluid), he was very open to the belief that he could diplomatisise as well as fight, and lead a movement yet better than follow it. Even so the signora tried to read his case.

They were all, excepting Countess Ammiani ("who will never, I fear, do me this honour," Violetta wrote,

and the countess said, "Never," and quoted a proverb), about to pass three or four days at the villa of Countess d'Isorella. Before they set out, Vittoria received a portentous envelope containing a long scroll, that was headed "YOUR CRIMES," and detailing a list of her offences against the country, from the revelation of the plot in her first letter to Wilfrid, to services rendered to the enemy during the war, up to the departure of Charles Albert out of forsaken Milan.

"B. R." was the undisguised signature at the end of the scroll.

Things of this description restored her old war-spirit to Vittoria. She handed the scroll to Laura; Laura, in great alarm, passed it on to Carlo. He sent for Angelo Guidascarpì in haste, for Carlo read it as an ante-dated justificatory document to some mischievous design, and he desired that hands as sure as his own, and yet more vigilant eyes, should keep watch over his betrothed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VIOLETTA D'ISORELLA.

THE villa inhabited by Countess d'Isorella was on the water's edge, within clear view of the projecting Villa Ricciardi, in that darkly-wooded region of the lake which leads up to the Italian-Swiss canton.

Violetta received here an envoy from Anna of Lenkenstein, direct out of Milan : an English lady, calling herself Mrs. Sedley, and a particular friend of Countess Anna. At one glance Violetta saw that her visitor had the pretension to match her arts against her own ; so, to sound her thoroughly, she offered her the hospitalities of the villa for a day or more. The invitation was accepted. Much to Violetta's astonishment, the lady betrayed no anxiety to state the exact terms of her mission ; she appeared, on the contrary, to have an unbounded satisfaction in the society of her hostess, and prattled of herself and

Antonio-Pericles, and her old affection for Vittoria, with the wildest simplicity, only requiring to be assured at times that she spoke intelligible Italian and exquisite French. Violetta supposed her to feel that she commanded the situation. Patient study of this woman revealed to Violetta the amazing fact that she was dealing with a born bourgeoisie, who, not devoid of petty acuteness, was unaffectedly enjoying her noble small talk, and the prospect of a footing in Italian high society. Violetta smiled at the comedy she had been playing in, scarcely reproaching herself for not having imagined it. She proceeded to the point of business without further delay.

Adela Sedley had nothing but a verbal message to deliver. The countess Anna of Lenkenstein offered, on her word of honour as a noblewoman, to make over the quarter of her estate and patrimony to the countess d'Isorella, if the latter should succeed in thwarting—something.

Forced to speak plainly, Adela confessed she thought she knew the nature of that something.

To preclude its being named, Violetta then diverged from the subject.

“We will go round to your friend the signor Antonio-Pericles at Villa Ricciardi,” she said. “You will see that he treats me familiarly, but he is not a

lover of mine. I suspect your 'something' has something to do with the Jesuits."

Adela Sedley replied to the penultimate sentence: "It would not surprise me, indeed, to hear of any number of adorers."

"I have the usual retinue, possibly," said Violetta."

"Dear countess, I could be one of them myself!" Adela burst out with tentative boldness.

"Then, kiss me."

And behold, they interchanged that unsweet feminine performance.

Adela's lips were unlocked by it.

"How many would envy me, dear Countess d'Isorella!"

She really conceived that she was driving into Violetta's heart by the great high road of feminine vanity. Violetta permitted her to think as she liked.

"Your countrywomen, madame, do not make large allowances for beauty, I hear."

"None at all. But they are so stiff! so frigid! I know one, a Miss Ford, now in Italy, who would not let me have a male friend, and a character, in conjunction."

"You are acquainted with Count Karl Lenkenstein?"

Adela blushingly acknowledged it.

"The whisper goes that I was once admired by him," said Violetta.

"And by Count Ammiani."

"By count? by milord? by prince? by king?"

"By all who have good taste."

"Was it jealousy, then, that made Countess Anna hate me?"

"She could not—or she cannot now."

"Because I have not taken possession of her brother."

"I could not—may I say it?—I could not understand his infatuation until Countess Anna showed me the portrait of Italy's most beautiful living woman. She told me to look at the last of the Borgia family."

Violetta laughed out clear music. "And now you see her?"

"She said that it had saved her brother's life. It has a star and a scratch on the left cheek from a dagger. He wore it on his heart, and an assassin struck him there: a true romance. Countess Anna said to me that it had saved one brother, and that it should help to avenge the other. She has not spoken to me of Jesuits."

"Nothing at all of the Jesuits?" said Violetta

carelessly. "Perhaps she wishes to use my endeavours to get the Salasco armistice prolonged, and tempts me, knowing I am a prodigal. Austria is victorious, you know, but she wants peace. Is that the case? I do not press you to answer."

Adela replied hesitatingly: "Are you aware, countess, whether there is any truth in the report that Countess Lena has a passion for Count Ammiani?"

"Ah, then," said Violetta, "Countess Lena's sister would naturally wish to prevent his contemplated marriage! We may have read the riddle at last. Are you discreet? If you are, you will let it be known that I had the honour of becoming intimate with you in Turin—say, at the Court. We shall meet frequently there during winter, I trust, if you care to make a comparison of the Italian with the Austrian and the English nobility."

An eloquent "Oh!" escaped from Adela's bosom. She had certainly not expected to win her way with this estimable Italian titled lady thus rapidly. Violetta had managed her so well that she was no longer sure whether she did know the exact nature of her mission, the words of which she had faithfully transmitted as having been alone confided to her. It was with chagrin that she saw Pericles put his forefinger on a salient dimple of the

countess's cheek when he welcomed them. He puffed and blew like one working simultaneously at bugle and big drum on hearing an allusion to Vittoria. The mention of the name of that abominable traitress was interdicted at Villa Ricciardi, he said; she had dragged him at two armies' tails to find his right senses at last: Pericles was cured of his passion for her at last. He had been mad, but he was cured—and so forth, in the old strain. His preparations for a private operatic performance diverted him from these fierce incriminations, and he tripped busily from spot to spot, conducting the ladies over the tumbled lower floors of the spacious villa, and calling their admiration on the desolation of the scene. Then they went up to the maestro's room. Pericles became deeply considerate for the master's privacy. "He is my slave; the man has ruined himself for la Vittoria; but I respect the impersonation of art," he said under his breath to the ladies as they stood at the door; "hark!" The piano was touched, and the voice of Irma di Karski broke out in a shrill crescendo. Rocco Ricci within gave tongue to the vehement damnatory dance of Pericles outside. Rocco struck his piano again encouragingly for a second attempt, but Irma was sobbing. She was heard to say: "This is the

fifteenth time you have pulled me down in one morning. You hate me; you do; you hate me." Rocco ran his fingers across the keys, and again struck the octave for Irma. Pericles wiped his forehead when, impenitent and unteachable, she took the notes in the manner of a cock. He thumped at the door violently and entered.

"Excellent! horrid! brava! abominable! beautiful! My Irma, you have reached the skies. You ascend like a firework, and crown yourself at the top. No more to-day; but descend at your leisure, my dear, and we will try to mount again by-and-by, and not so fast, if you please. Ha! your voice is a race-horse. You will learn to ride him with temper and judgment, and you will go. Not so, my Rocco? Irma, you want repose, my dear. One thing I guarantee to you—you will please the public. It is a minor thing that you should please me."

Countess d'Isorella led Irma away, and had to bear with many fits of weeping, and to assent to the force of all the charges of vindictive conspiracy and inveterate malice with which the jealous creature assailed Vittoria's name. The countess then claimed her ear for half-a-minute.

"Have you had any news of Countess Anna lately?"

Irma had not; she admitted it despondently. "There is such a vile conspiracy against me in Italy—and Italy is a poor singer's fame—that I should be tempted to do anything. And I detest la Vittoria. She has such a hold on this Antonio-Pericles, I don't see how I can hurt her, unless I meet her and fly at her throat."

"You naturally detest her," said the countess. "Repeat Countess Anna's proposition to you."

"It was insulting—she offered me money."

"That you should persuade *me* to assist you in preventing la Vittoria's marriage to Count Ammiani?"

"Dear lady, you know I did not try to persuade you."

"You knew that you would not succeed, my Irma. But Count Ammiani will not marry her; so you will have a right to claim some reward. I do not think that la Vittoria is quite idle. Look out for yourself, my child. If you take to plotting, remember it is a game of two."

"If she thwarts me in one single step, I will let loose that madman on her," said Irma, trembling.

"You mean the signor Antonio-Pericles?"

"No; I mean that furious man I saw at your villa, dear countess."

“Ah! Barto Rizzo. A very furious man. He bellowed when he heard her name, I remember. You must not do it. But, for Count Ammiani’s sake, I desire to see his marriage postponed, at least.”

“Where is she?” Irma inquired.

The countess shrugged. “Even though I knew, I could not prudently tell you in your present excited state.”

She went to Pericles for a loan of money. Pericles remarked that there was not much of it in Turin. “But, countess, you whirl the gold-pieces like dust from your wheels; and a spy, my good soul, a lovely secret emissary, she will be getting underpaid if she allows herself to want money. There is your beauty; it is ripe, but it is fresh, and it is extraordinary. Yes; there is your beauty.” Before she could obtain a promise of the money, Violetta had to submit to be stripped to her character, which was hard; but on the other hand, Pericles exacted no interest on his money, and it was not often that he exacted a return of it in coin. Under these circumstances, ladies in need of money can find it in their hearts to pardon mere brutality of phrase. Pericles promised to send it to the countess on one condition; which condition he cancelled, saying dejectedly, “I do not care to know where she is. I will not know.”

"She has the score of *Hagar*, wherever she is," said Violetta, "and when she hears that you have done the scena without her aid, you will have stuck a dagger in her bosom."

"Not," Pericles cried in despair, "not if she should hear Irma's *Hagar*! To the desert with Irma. It is the place for a crab-apple. Bravo, Abraham! you were wise."

Pericles added that Montini was hourly expected, and that there was to be a rehearsal in the evening.

When she had driven home, Violetta found Barto Rizzo's accusatory paper laid on her writing-desk. She gathered the contents in a careless glance, and walked into the garden alone, to look for Carlo.

He was leaning on the balustrade of the terrace, near the water-gate, looking into the deep clear lake-water. Violetta placed herself beside him without a greeting.

"You are watching fish for coolness, my Carlo?"

"Yes," he said, and did not turn to her face.

"You were very angry when you arrived?"

She waited for his reply.

"Why do you not speak, Carlino?"

"I am watching fish for coolness," he said.

"Meantime," said Violetta, "I am scorched."

He looked up, and led her to an arch of shade, where he sat quite silent.

"Can anything be more vexing than this?" she was reduced to exclaim.

"Ah!" said he, "you would like the catalogue to be written out for you in a big bold hand, possibly, with a terrific initials at the end of the page."

"Carlo, you have done worse than that. When I saw you first here, what crimes did you not accuse me of? what names did you not scatter on my head? and what things did I not confess to? I bore the unkindness, for you were beaten, and you wanted a victim. And, my dear friend, considering that I am after all a woman, my forbearance has subsequently been still greater."

"How?" he asked. Her half-pathetic candour melted him.

"You must have a lively memory for the uses of forgetfulness, Carlo. When you had scourged me well, you thought it proper to raise me up and give me comfort. I was wicked for serving the king, and therefore the country, as a spy; but I was to persevere, and cancel my iniquities by betraying those whom I served to you. That was your instructive precept. Have I done it or not? Answer, too—have I done it for any payment beyond your approbation?"

I persuaded you to hope for Lombardy, and without any vaunting of my own patriotism. You have seen and spoken to the men I directed you to visit. If their heads master yours, I shall be reprobated for it, I know surely; but I am confident as yet that you can match them. In another month I expect to see the king over the Ticino once more, and Carlo in Brescia with his comrades. You try to penetrate my eyes. That's foolish; I can make them glass. Read me by what I say and what I do. I do not entreat you to trust *me*; I merely beg that you will trust your own judgment of me by what I have helped you to do hitherto. You and I, my dear boy, have had some trifling together. Admit that another woman would have refused to surrender you as I did when your unruly Vittoria was at last induced to come to you from Milan. Or, another woman would have had her revenge on discovering that she had been a puppet of soft eyes and a lover's quarrel with his mistress. Instead of which, I let you go. I am opposed to the marriage, it's true; and you know why."

Carlo had listened to Violetta, measuring the false and the true in this recapitulation of her conduct with cool accuracy until she alluded to their personal relations. Thereat his brows darkened.

“ We had ‘some trifling together,’ ” he said, musingly.

“ Is it going to be denied in these sweeter days ? ”
Violetta reddened.

“ The phrase is elastic. Suppose my bride were to hear it ? ”

“ It was addressed to your ears, Carlo.”

“ It cuts two ways. Will you tell me when it was that I last had the happiness of saluting you, lip to lip ? ”

“ In Brescia—before I had espoused an imbecile—two nights before my marriage—near the fountain of the Greek girl with a pitcher.”

Pride and anger nerved the reply. It was uttered in a rapid low breath. Coming altogether unexpectedly, it created an intense momentary revulsion of his feelings by conjuring up his boyish love in a scene more living than the sunlight.

He lifted her hand to his mouth. He was Italian enough, though a lover, to feel that she deserved more. She had reddened deliciously, and therewith hung a dewy rosy moisture on her underlids. Raising her eyes, she looked like a cut orange to a thirsty lip. He kissed her, saying, “ Pardon.”

“ Keep it secret, you mean ? ” she retorted. “ Yes,

I pardon that wish of yours. I can pardon much to my beauty."

She stood up as majestically as she had spoken.

"You know, my Violetta, that I am madly in love."

"I have learnt it."

"You know it:—what else would . . . ? If I were not lost in love, could I see you as I do and let Brescia be the final chapter?"

Violetta sighed. "I should have preferred its being so rather than this superfluous additional line to announce an end, like a foolish staff on the edge of a cliff. You thought that you were saluting a leper, or a saint?"

"Neither. If ever we can talk together again as we have done," Carlo said gloomily, "I will tell you what I think of myself."

"No, but Richelieu might have behaved Ah! perhaps not quite in the same way," she corrected her flowing apology for him. "But then, he was a Frenchman. He could be flighty without losing his head. Dear Italian Carlo! Yes, in the teeth of Barto Rizzo, and *for the sake* of the country, marry her at once. It will be the best thing for you; really the best. You want to know from me the whereabouts of Barto Rizzo. He may be in the mountain over Stresa, or in Milan. He also has

thrown off my yoke, such as it was! I do assure you, Carlo, I have no command over him: but, mind, I half doat on the wretch. No man made me desperately in love with myself before he saw me, when I stopped his raving in the middle of the road with one look of my face. There was foam on his beard and round his eyes; the poor wretch took out his handkerchief, and he sobbed. I don't know how many luckless creatures he had killed on his way; but when I took him into my carriage—king, emperor, orator on stilts, minister of police—not one has flattered me as he did, by just gazing at me. Beauty can do as much as music, my Carlo.”

Carlo thanked heaven that Violetta had no passion in her nature. She had none; merely a leaning towards evil, a light sense of shame, a desire for money, and in her heart a contempt for the principles she did not possess, but which, apart from the intervention of other influences, could occasionally sway her actions. Friendship, or rather the shadowy recovery of a past attachment that had been more than friendship, inclined her now and then to serve a master who failed distinctly to represent her interests; and when she met Carlo after the close of the war, she had really set to work in hearty kindness to rescue him from what she termed “shipwreck

with that disastrous Republican crew." He had obtained greater ascendancy over her than she liked; yet she would have forgiven it, as well as her consequent slight deviation from direct allegiance to her masters in various cities, but for Carlo's commanding personal coolness. She who had tamed a madman by her beauty, was outraged, and not unnaturally, by the indifference of a former lover.

Later in the day, Laura and Vittoria, with Agostino, reached the villa; and Adela put her lips to Vittoria's ear, whispering: "Naughty! when are you to lose your liberty to turn men's heads?" and then she heaved a sigh with Wilfrid's name. She had formed the acquaintance of Countess d'Isorella in Turin, she said, and satisfactorily repeated her lesson, but with a blush. She was little more than a shade to Vittoria, who wondered what she had to live for. After the early evening dinner, when sunlight and the colours of the sun were beyond the western mountains, they pushed out on the lake. A moon was overhead, seeming to drop lower on them as she filled with light. Agostino's conceits ran like sparks over dead paper: "The moon was in her nunnery below:" "The clock on the high tower (quasi-campanile) of the Villa Ricciardi blazed to the sunset, deeming it no piece of supererogation to tell

the God of Day the hour:” “Or to tell a king he is beaten,” said Vittoria, so reminding him of their many discussions upon Charles Albert. Carlo laughed at the queer fall of Agostino’s chin.

“We near the vesper hour, my daughter,” said Agostino; “you would provoke me to argumentation in heaven itself. I am for peace. I remember looking down on two cats with arched backs in the solitary arena of the Verona amphitheatre. We men, my Carlo, will not, in the decay of time, so conduct ourselves.”

“If you mean that you will allow the hour to pass without discord, I approve you,” said Violetta.

Vittoria looked on Laura and thought of the cannon-sounding hours, whose echoes rolled over their slaughtered hope. The sun fell, the moon shone, and the sun would rise again, but Italy lay face to earth. They had seen her together before the enemy. That recollection was a joy that stood, though the winds beat at it, and the torrents. She loved her friend’s worn eyelids and softly-shut mouth;—the after-glow of battle seemed on them; the silence of the field of carnage under heaven;—and the patient turning of Laura’s eyes this way and that to speakers upon common things, covered the despair of her heart as with a soldier’s cloak.

Laura met the tender study of Vittoria's look and smiled.

They neared the villa Ricciardi, and heard singing. The villa was lighted profusely, so that it made a little mock-sunset on the lake.

"Irma!" said Vittoria, astonished at the ring of a well-known voice that shot up in firework fashion, as Pericles had said of it. Incredulous, she listened till she was sure; and then glanced hurried questions at all eyes. Violetta laughed, saying, "You have the score of Rocco Ricci's *Hagar*."

The boat drew under the blazing windows, and half guessing, half hearing, Vittoria understood that Pericles was giving an entertainment here, and had abjured her. She was not insensible to the slight. This feeling, joined to her long unsatisfied craving to sing, led her to be intolerant of Irma's style, and visibly vexed her.

Violetta whispered: "He declares that your voice is cracked: show him! Burst out with the 'Addio' of Hagar. May she not, Carlo? Don't you permit the poor soul to sing? She cannot contain herself."

Carlo, Adela, Agostino, and Violetta prompted her, and, catching a pause in the villa, she sang the opening notes of Hagar's "Addio" with her old glorious fulness of tone and perfect utterance.

The first who called her name was Rocco Ricci, but Pericles was the first to rush out and hang over the boat. "Witch! traitress! infernal ghost! heart of ice!" and in English "humbug!" and in French "coquine!" These were a few of the titles he poured on her. Rocco Ricci and Montini kissed hands to her, begging her to come to them. She was very willing outwardly, and in her heart most eager; but Carlo bade the rowers push off. Then it was pitiful to hear the means of abject supplication from Pericles. He implored Count Ammiani's pardon, Vittoria's pardon, for telling her what she was; and as the boat drew farther away, he offered her sums of money to enter the villa and sing the score of *Hagar*; sums of money to every form of assistance. He offered to bear the blame of her bad behaviour to him, said he would forget it and stamp it out; that he would pay for the provisioning of a regiment of volunteers for a whole month; that he would present her marriage trousseau to her—yea, and let her marry. "Sandra! my dear! my dear!" he cried, and stretched over the parapet speechless, like a puppet slain.

So strongly did she comprehend the sincerity of his passion for her voice that she could or would see nothing extravagant in this demonstration which excited unrestrained laughter in every key from her

companions in the boat. When the boat was about a hundred yards from the shore, and in full moonlight, she sang the great "Addio" of Hagar. At the close of it, she had to feel for her lover's hand blindly. No one spoke, either at the Villa Ricciardi, or about her. Her voice possessed the mountain-shadowed lake.

The rowers pulled lustily home through chill air.

Luigi and Beppo were at the villa, both charged with news from Milan. Beppo claiming the right to speak first, which Luigi granted with a magnificent sweep of his hand, related that Captain Weisspriess, of the garrison, had wounded Count Medole in a duel severely. He brought a letter to Vittoria from Merthyr, in which Merthyr urged her to prevent Count Ammiani's visiting Milan for any purpose whatever, and said that he was coming to be present at her marriage. She was reading this while Luigi delivered his burden; which was that, in a subsequent duel, the slaughtering captain had killed little Leone Rufo, the gay and gallant boy, Carlo's comrade, and her friend.

Luigi laughed scornfully at his rival, and had edged away out of sight before he could be asked who had sent him. Beppo ignominiously confessed that he had not heard of this second duel. At mid-

night he was on horseback, bound for Milan, with a challenge to the captain from Carlo, who had a jealous fear that Luciano at Vercelli might have outstripped him. Carlo requested the captain to guarantee him an hour's immunity in the city on a stated day, or to name any spot on the borders of Piedmont for the meeting. The challenge was sent with Countess Ammiani's approbation and Laura's. Vittoria submitted.

That done, Carlo gave up his heart to his bride. A fight in prospect was the hope of wholesome work after his late indecision and double play. They laughed at themselves, accused hotly, and humbly excused themselves, praying for mutual pardon.

She had behaved badly in disobeying his mandate from Brescia.

Yes, but had he not been over-imperious?

True; still she should have remembered her promise in the Vicentino!

She did indeed; but how could she quit her wounded friend Merthyr?

Perhaps not: then, why had she sent word to him from Milan that she would be at Pallanza?

This question knocked at a sealed chamber. She was silent, and Carlo had to brood over something as

well. He gave her hints of his foolish pique, his wrath and bitter baffled desire for her when, coming to Pallanza, he came to an empty house. But he could not help her to see, for he did not himself feel, that he had been spurred by silly passions, pique, and wrath, to plunge instantly into new political intrigue; and that some of his worst faults had become mixed up with his devotion to his country. Had he taken Violetta for an ally in all purity of heart? The kiss he had laid on the woman's sweet lips had shaken his absolute belief in that. He tried to set his brain travelling backward, in order to contemplate accurately the point of his original weakness. It being almost too severe a task for any young head, Carlo deemed it sufficient that he should say—and this he felt—that he was unworthy of his beloved. Could Vittoria listen to such stuff? She might have kissed him to stop the flow of it, but kissings were rare between them; so rare that, when they had put mouth to mouth, a little quivering spire of flame, dim at the base, stood to mark the spot in their memories. She moved her hand, as to throw aside such talk. Unfretful in blood, chaste and keen, she at least knew the foolishness of the common form of lovers' trifling when there is a burning love to keep under, and Carlo saw

that she did, and adored her for this highest proof of the passion of her love.

“In three days you will be mine, if I do not hear from Milan? within five, if I do?” he said.

Vittoria gave him the whole beauty of her face a divine minute, and bowed it assenting. Carlo then led her to his mother, before whom he embraced her for the comfort of his mother’s heart. They decided that there should be no whisper of the marriage until the couple were one. Vittoria obtained the countess’s permission to write for Merthyr to attend her at the altar. She had seen Weisspriess fall in combat, and she had perfect faith in her lover’s right hand.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ANNA OF LENKENSTEIN.

CAPTAIN WEISSPRIESS replied to Carlo Ammiani promptly, naming Camerlata by Como, as the place where he would meet him.

He stated at the end of some temperate, formal lines, that he had given Count Ammiani the preference over half-a-dozen competitors for the honour of measuring swords with him ; but that his adversary must not expect him to be always ready to instruct the young gentlemen of the Lombardo-Venetian province in the arts of fence ; and therefore he begged to observe that his encounter with Count Ammiani would be the last occasion upon which he should hold himself bound to accept a challenge from Count Ammiani's countrymen.

It was quite possible, the captain said, drawing a familiar illustration from the gaming-table, to break

the stoutest bank in the world by a perpetual multiplication of your bets, and he was modest enough to remember that he was but one man against some thousands, to contend with all of whom would be exhausting.

Consequently the captain desired Count Ammiani to proclaim to his countrymen that the series of challenges must terminate; and he requested him to advertise the same in a Milanese, a Turin, and a Neapolitan journal.

“I am not a butcher,” he concluded. “The task you inflict upon me is scarcely bearable. Call it by what name you will, it is having ten shots to one, which was generally considered an equivalent to murder. My sword is due to you, Count Ammiani; and, as I know you to be an honourable nobleman, I would rather you were fighting in Venice, though your cause is hopeless, than standing up to match yourself against me. Let me add that I deeply respect the lady who is engaged to be united to you, and would not willingly cross steel either with her lover or her husband. I shall be at Camerlata at the time appointed. If I do not find you there I shall understand that you have done me the honour to take my humble advice, and have gone where your courage may at least appear to have done better

service. I shall sheathe my sword and say no more about it."

All of this, save the concluding paragraph, was written under the eyes of Countess Anna of Lenkenstein.

He carried it to his quarters, where he appended the—as he deemed it—conciliatory passage: after which he handed it to Beppo, in a square of the barracks, with a *buon'mano* that Beppo received bowing, and tossed to an old decorated regimental dog of many wounds and a veteran's gravity. For this offence a Styrian grenadier seized him by the shoulders, lifting him off his feet and swinging him easily, while the dog arose from his contemplation of the coin and swayed an expectant tail. The Styrian had dashed Beppo to earth before Weisspriess could interpose, and the dog had got him by the throat. In the struggle Beppo tore off the dog's medal for distinguished conduct on the field of battle. He restored it as soon as he was free, and won unanimous plaudits from officers and soldiers for his kindly thoughtfulness and the pretty manner with which he dropped on one knee, and assuaged the growls, and attached the medal to the old dog's neck. Weisspriess walked away. Beppo then challenged his Styrian to fight. The case was laid before a

couple of sergeants, who shook their heads on hearing his condition to be that of a serving-man. The Styrian was ready to waive considerations of superiority ; but the judges pronounced their veto. A soldier in the imperial-royal service, though he was merely a private in the ranks, could not accept a challenge from civilians below the rank of notary, secretary, hotel- or inn-keeper, and such-like : servants and tradesmen he must seek to punish in some other way ; and they also had their appeal to his commanding officer. So went the decision of the military tribunal, until the Styrian, having contrived to make Beppo understand, by the agency of a single Italian verb, that he wanted a blow, Beppo spun about and delivered a stinging smack on the Styrian's cheek ; which altered the view of the case, for, under peculiar circumstances—supposing that he did not choose to cut him down—a soldier might condescend to challenge his civilian inferiors—“in our regiment,” said the sergeants, meaning that they had relaxed the stringency of their laws.

Beppo met his Styrian outside the city walls, and laid him flat. He declined to fight a second ; but it was represented to him, by the aid of an interpreter, that the officers of the garrison were subjected to successive challenges, and that the first trial of his

skill might have been nothing finer than luck; and besides, his adversary had a right to call a champion. "We all do it," the soldiers assured him. "Now your blood's up you're ready for a dozen of us;" which was less true of a constitution that was quicker in expending its heat. He stood out against a young fellow almost as limber as himself, much taller, and longer in the reach, by whom he was quickly disabled with cuts on thigh and head. Seeing this easy victory over him, the soldiers, previously quite civil, cursed him for having got the better of their fallen comrade, and went off discussing how he had done the trick, leaving him to lie there. A peasant carried him to a small suburban inn, where he remained several days oppressed horribly by a sense that he had forgotten something. When he recollected what it was, he entrusted the captain's letter to his landlady;—a good woman, but she chanced to have a scamp of a husband, who snatched it from her and took it to his market. Beppo supposed the letter to be on its way to Pallanza, when it was in General Schöneck's official desk; and soon afterwards the breath of a scandalous rumour began to circulate.

Captain Wiesspriess had gone down to Camerlata, accompanied by a Colonel Volpo, of an Austro-

Italian regiment, and by Lieutenant Jenna. At Camerlata a spectacled officer, Major Nagen, joined them. Weisspriess was the less pleased with his company on hearing that he had come to witness the meeting, in obedience to an express command of a person who was interested in it. Jenna was the captain's friend: Volpo was seconding him for the purpose of getting Count Ammiani to listen to reason from the mouth of a countryman. There could be no doubt in the captain's mind that this Major Nagen was Countess Anna's spy as well as his rival, and he tried to be rid of him; but in addition to the shortness of sight which was Nagen's plea for pushing his thin transparent nose into every corner, he enjoyed at will an intermittent deafness, and could hear anything without knowing of it. Brother officers said of Major Nagen that he was occasionally equally senseless in the nose, which had been tweaked without disturbing the repose of his features. He waited half-an-hour on the ground after the appointed time, and then hurried to Milan. Weisspriess waited an hour. Satisfied that Count Ammiani was not coming, he exacted from Volpo and from Jenna their word of honour as Austrian officers that they would forbear to cast any slur on the courage of his adversary, and would be so discreet on the subject as to imply that

the duel was a drawn affair. They pledged themselves accordingly. "There's Nagen, it's true," said Weisspriess, as a man will say and feel that he has done his best to prevent a thing inevitable.

Milan, and some of the journals of Milan, soon had Carlo Ammiani's name up for challenging Weisspriess and failing to keep his appointment. It grew to be discussed as a tremendous event. The captain received fifteen challenges within two days; among these a second one from Luciano Romara, whom he was beginning to have a strong desire to encounter. He repressed it, as quondam drunkards fight off the whisper of their lips for liquor. "No more blood," was his constant inward cry. He wanted peace; but as he also wanted Countess Anna of Lenkenstein and her estates, it may possibly be remarked of him that what he wanted he did not want to pay for.

At this period Wilfrid had resumed the Austrian uniform as a common soldier in the ranks of the Kinsky regiment. General Schöneck had obtained the privilege for him from the marshal, General Pierson refusing to lift a finger on his behalf. Nevertheless the uncle was not sorry to hear the tale of his nephew's exploits during the campaign, or of the eccentric intrepidity of the white umbrella; and both

to please him, and to intercede for Wilfrid, the latter's old comrades recited his deeds as a part of the treasured familiar history of the army in its late arduous struggle.

General Pierson was chiefly anxious to know whether Countess Lena would be willing to give her hand to Wilfrid in the event of his restoration to his antecedent position in the army. He found her extremely excited about Carlo Ammiani, her old playmate, and once her dear friend. She would not speak of Wilfrid at all. To appease the chivalrous little woman, General Pierson hinted that his nephew, being under the protection of General Schöneck, might get some intelligence from that officer. Lena pretended to reject the notion of her coming into communication with Wilfrid for any earthly purpose. She said to herself, however, that her object was pre-eminently unselfish; and as the general pointedly refused to serve her in a matter that concerned an Italian nobleman, she sent directions to Wilfrid to go before General Schöneck the moment he was off duty, and ask his assistance, in her name, to elucidate the mystery of Count Ammiani's behaviour. The answer was a transmission of Captain Weisspriess's letter to Carlo. Lena caused the fact of this letter having missed its way to be circulated in the

journals, and then she carried it triumphantly to her sister, saying :

“There ! I knew these reports were a base calumny.”

“Reports, to what effect ? ” said Anna.

“That Carlo Ammiani had slunk from a combat with your duellist.”

“Oh ! I knew that myself,” Anna remarked.

“You were the loudest in proclaiming it.”

“Because I intend to ruin him.”

“Carlo Ammiani ? What has he done to you ? ”

Anna’s eyes had fallen on the additional lines of the letter which she had not dictated. She frowned and exclaimed :

“What is this ? Does the man play me false ? Read those lines, Lena, and tell me, does the man mean to fight in earnest who can dare to write them ? He advises Ammiani to go to Venice. It’s treason, if it is not cowardice. And see here—he has the audacity to say that he deeply respects the lady Ammiani is going to marry. Is Ammiani going to marry her ? I think not.”

Anna dashed the letter to the floor.

“But I will make use of what’s within my reach,” she said, picking it up.

“Carlo Ammiani will marry her, I presume,” said Lena.

“Not before he has met Captain Weisspriess, who, by the way, has obtained his majority. And, Lena, my dear, write to inform him that we wish to offer him our congratulations. He will be a general officer in good time.”

“Perhaps you forget that Count Ammiani is a perfect swordsman, Anna.”

“Weisspriess remembers it for me, perhaps;—is that your idea, Lena?”

“He might do so profitably. You have thrown him on two swords.”

“Merely to provoke the third. He is invincible. If he were not, where would his use be?”

“Oh, how I loathe revenge!” cried Lena.

“You cannot love!” her sister retorted. “That woman calling herself Vittoria Campa shall suffer. She has injured and defied me. How was it that she behaved to us at Meran? She is mixed up with assassins; she is insolent—a dark-minded slut; and she catches stupid men. My brother, my country, and this weak Weisspriess, as I saw him lying in the Ultenthal, cry out against her. I have no sleep. I am not revengeful. Say it, say it, all of you! but I am not. I am not unforgiving. I worship justice, and a black deed haunts me. Let the wicked be contrite and wasted in tears, and I think I can pardon

them. But I will have them on their knees. I hate that woman Vittoria more than I hate Angelo Guidascari. Look, Lena. If both were begging for life to me, I would send him to the gallows and her to her bedchamber; and all because I worship justice, and believe it to be the weapon of the good and pious. You have a baby's heart; so has Karl. He declines to second Weisspriess; he will have nothing to do with duelling; he would behold his sisters mocked in the streets, and pass on. He talks of Paul's death like a priest. Priests are worthy men; a great resource! Give me a priest's lap when I need it. Shall *I* be condemned to go to the priest and leave that woman singing? If I did, I might well say the world's a snare, a sham, a pitfall, a horror! It's what I don't think in any degree. It's what *you* think, though. Yes, whenever you are vexed you think it. So do the priests, and so do all who will not exert themselves to chastise. I, on the contrary, know that the world is not made up of nonsense. Write to Weisspriess immediately; I must have him here in an hour."

Weisspriess, on visiting the ladies to receive their congratulations, was unprepared for the sight of his letter to Carlo Ammiani, which Anna thrust before him after he had saluted her, bidding him read it

aloud. He perused it in silence. He was beginning to be afraid of his mistress.

"I called you Austria once, for you were always ready," Anna said, and withdrew from him, that the sting of her words might take effect.

"God knows, I have endeavoured to earn the title in my humble way," Weisspriess appealed to Lena.

"Yes, Major Weisspriess, you have," she said. "Be Austria still, and forbear towards these people as much as you can. To beat them is enough in my mind. I am rejoiced that you have not met Count Ammiani, for if you had, two friends of mine, equally dear and equally skilful, would have held their lives at one another's mercy."

"Equally!" said Weisspriess, and pulled out the length of his moustache.

"Equally courageous," Lena corrected herself. "I never distrusted Count Ammiani's courage, nor could distrust yours."

"Equally dear!" Weisspriess tried to direct a concentrated gaze on her.

Lena evaded an answer by speaking of the rumour of Count Ammiani's marriage.

Weisspriess was thinking with all the sagacious penetration of the military mind that perhaps this sister was trying to tell him that she would be willing

to usurp the place of the other in his affections; and if so, why should she not?

“I may cherish the idea that I am dear to you, Countess Lena?”

“When you are formally betrothed to my sister, you will know you are very dear to me, Major Weisspriess.”

“But,” said he, perceiving his error, “how many persons am I to call out before she will consent to a formal betrothal?”

Lena was half smiling at the little tentative bit of sentiment she had so easily turned aside. Her advice to him was to refuse to fight, seeing that he had done sufficient for glory and his good name.

He mentioned Major Nagen as a rival.

Upon this she said: “Hear me one minute. I was in my sister’s bedroom on the first night when she knew of your lying wounded in the Ultenthal. She told you just now that she called you Austria. She adores our Austria in you. The thought that you had been vanquished seemed like our Austria vanquished, and she is so strong for Austria that it is really out of her power to fancy you as defeated without suspecting foul play. So when she makes you fight, she thinks you safe. Many are to go down because you have gone down. Do you not see?”

And now, Major Weisspriess, I need not expose my sister to you any more, I hope, or depreciate Major Nagen for your satisfaction."

Weisspriess had no other interview with Anna for several days. She shunned him openly. Her carriage moved off when he advanced to meet her at the parade, or review of arms; and she did not scruple to speak in public with Major Nagen, in the manner of those who have begun to speak together in private. The offender received his punishment gracefully, as men will who have been taught that it flatters them. He refused every challenge. From Carlo Ammiani there came not a word.

It would have been a deadly lull to any fiery temperament engaged in plotting to destroy a victim, but Anna had the patience of hatred—that absolute malignity which can measure its exultation rather by the gathering of its power to harm than by striking. She could lay it aside, or sink it to the bottom of her emotions, at will, when circumstances appeared against it. And she could do this without fretful regrets, without looking to the future. The spirit of her hatred extracted its own nourishment from things, like an organized creature. When foiled she became passive, and she enjoyed—forced herself compliantly to enjoy—her redoubled energy of hatred volup-

tuously, if ever a turn in events made wreck of her scheming. She hated Vittoria for many reasons, all of them vague within her bosom because the source of them was indefinite and lay in the fact of her having come into collision with an opposing nature, whose rivalry was no visible rivalry, whose triumph was an ignorance of scorn—a woman who attracted all men, who scattered injuries with insolent artlessness, who never appealed to forgiveness, and was a low-born woman daring to be proud. By repute Anna was implacable, but she had, and knew she had, the capacity for magnanimity of a certain kind; and her knowledge of the existence of this unsuspected fund within her, justified in some degree her reckless efforts to pull her enemy down on her knees. It seemed doubly right that she should force Vittoria to penitence, as being good for the woman, and an end that exonerated her own private sins committed to effect it. Yet she did not look clearly forward to the day of Vittoria's imploring for mercy. She had too many vexations to endure: she was an insufficient schemer, and was too frequently thwarted to enjoy that ulterior prospect. Her only servile instruments were Major Nagen, and Irma, who came to her from the Villa Ricciardi, hot to do her rival any deadly injury; but though willing to attempt much, these

were apparently able to perform little more than the menial work of vengeance. Major Nagen wrote in the name of Weisspriess to Count Ammiani, appointing a second meeting at Como, and stating that he would be at the villa of the Duchess of Graätli there. Weisspriess was unsuspectingly taken down to the place by Anna and Lena. There was a gathering of such guests as the duchess alone among her countrywomen could assemble, under the patronage of the conciliatory Government, and the duchess projected to give a series of brilliant entertainments in the saloons of the Union, as she named her house-roof. Count Serabiglione arrived, as did numerous Moderates and priest party-men; Milanese garrison officers and others. Laura Piaveni travelled with Countess d'Isorella, and the happy Adela Sedley, from Lago Maggiore. Laura came, as she cruelly told her friend, for the purpose of making Vittoria's excuses to the duchess, "*Why* can she not come herself?" Amalia persisted in asking, and began to be afflicted with womanly curiosity. Laura would do nothing but shrug and smile, and repeat her message. A little after sunset, when the saloons were lighted, Weisspriess, sitting by his Countess Anna's side, had a slip of paper placed in his hands by one of the domestics. He quitted his post frowning with asto-

nishment, and muttered once, "*My* appointment!" Laura noticed that Anna's heavy eyelids lifted to shoot an expressive glance at Violetta d'Isorella. She said: "Can that have been anything hostile, do you suppose?" and glanced slyly at her friend.

"No, no," said Amalia; "the misunderstanding is explained, and Major Weisspriess is just as ready as Count Ammiani to listen to reason. Besides, Count Ammiani is not so unfriendly but that if he came so near he would come up to me, surely."

Laura brought Amalia's observation to bear upon Anna and Violetta by turning pointedly from one to the other as she said: "As for reason, perhaps you have chosen the word. If Count Ammiani attended an appointment this time, he would be unreasonable."

A startled "Why?" leaped from Anna's lips. She reddened at her impulsive clumsiness.

Laura raised her shoulders slightly: "Do you not know?" The expression of her face reproved Violetta, as for remissness in transmitting secret intelligence. "*You* can answer why, countess," she addressed the latter, eager to exercise her native love of conflict with this doubtfully-faithful countrywoman;—the Austrian could feel that she had

beaten her on the essential point, and afford to give her any number of dialectical victories.

"I really cannot answer why," Violetta said; "unless Count Ammiani is, as I venture to hope, better employed."

"But the answer is charming and perfect," said Laura.

"Enigmatical answers are declared to be so when they come from us women," the duchess remarked; "but then, I fancy, women must not be the hearers, or they will confess that they are just as much bewildered and irritated as I am. Do speak out, my dearest. How is he better employed?"

Laura passed her eyes around the group of ladies. "If any hero of yours had won the woman he loves, he would be right in thinking it folly to be bound by the invitation to fight, or feast, or what you will, within a space of three months or so; do you not agree with me?"

The different emotions on many visages made the scene curious.

"Count Ammiani has married her!" exclaimed the duchess.

"My old friend Carlo is really married!" said Lena.

Anna stared at Violetta.

The duchess, recovering from her wonder, confirmed the news by saying that she now knew why M. Powys had left Milan in haste, three or four days previously, as she was aware that the bride had always wished him to be present at the ceremony of her marriage.

"Signora, may I ask you were you present?" Violetta addressed Laura.

"I will answer most honestly that I was not," said Laura.

"The marriage was a secret one, perhaps?"

"Even for friends, you see."

"Necessarily, no doubt," Lena said, with an idea of easing her sister's stupefaction by a sarcasm foreign to her sentiments.

Adela Sedley, later in exactly comprehending what had been spoken, glanced about for some one who would not be unsympathetic to her exclamation, and suddenly beheld her brother entering the room with Weisspriess. "Wilfrid! Wilfrid! do you know she is married?"

"So they tell me," Wilfrid replied, while making his bow to the duchess. He was much broken in appearance, but wore his usual collected manner. Who had told him of the marriage? A person downstairs, he said; not Count Ammiani; not Signor

Balderini, no one whom he saw present, no one whom he knew.

“A very mysterious person,” said the duchess.

“Then it’s true after all,” cried Laura. “I did but guess it.” She assured Violetta that she had only guessed it.

“Does Major Weisspriess know it to be true?” The question came from Anna.

Weisspriess coolly verified it, on the faith of a common servant’s communication.

The ladies could see that some fresh piece of mystery lay between him and Wilfrid.

“With whom have you had an interview, and what have you heard?” asked Lena, vexed by Wilfrid’s pallid cheeks.

Both men stammered and protested, out of conceit, and were as foolish as men alone can be when they are pushed to play at mutual concealment.

The duchess’s chasseur, Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz, stepped up to his mistress and whispered discreetly. She gazed straight at Laura. After hesitation she shook her head, and the chasseur retired. Amalia then came to the rescue of the unhappy military wits that were standing a cross-fire of sturdy interrogation.

“Do you not perceive what it is?” she said to

Anna. "Major Weisspriess meets Private Pierson at the door of my house, and forgets that he is well-born and my guest. I may be revolutionary, but I declare that in plain clothes Private Pierson is the equal of Major Weisspriess. If bravery made men equals, who would be Herr Pierson's superior? He has done me the honour, at a sacrifice of his pride, I am sure, to come here and meet his sister, and rejoice me with his society. Major Weisspriess, if I understand the case correctly, you are greatly to blame."

"I beg to assert," Weisspriess was saying as the duchess turned her shoulder on him.

"There is really no foundation," Wilfrid began, with similar simplicity.

"What will sharpen the wits of these soldiers!" the duchess murmured dolefully to Laura.

"But Major Weisspriess was called out of this room by a message—was that from Private Pierson?" said Anna.

"Assuredly; I should presume so," the duchess answered for them.

"Ay; undoubtedly," Weisspriess supported her.

"Then," Laura smiled encouragement to Wilfrid, "you know nothing of Count Ammiani's marriage after all?"

Wilfrid launched his reply on a sharp repression of his breath, "Nothing whatever."

"And the common servant's communication was not made to you?" Anna interrogated Weisspriess.

"I simply followed in the track of Pierson," said that officer, masking his retreat from the position with a duck of his head and a smile, tooth on lip.

"How could you ever suppose, child, that a common servant would be sent to deliver such tidings? and to Major Weisspriess!" the duchess interposed.

This broke up the court of inquiry.

Weisspriess shortly after took his leave, on the plea that he wished to prove his friendliness by accompanying Private Pierson, who had to be on duty early next day in Milan. Amalia had seen him breaking from Anna in extreme irritation, and he had only to pledge his word that he was really bound for Milan to satisfy her. "I believe you to be at heart humane," she said meaningly.

"Duchess, you may be sure that I would not kill an enemy save on the point of my sword," he answered her.

"You are a gallant man," said Amalia, and pride was in her face as she looked on him.

She willingly consented to Wilfrid's sudden de-

parture, as it was evident that some shot had hit him hard.

On turning to Laura, the duchess beheld an aspect of such shrewd disgust that she was provoked to exclaim: "What on earth is the matter now?"

Laura would favour her with no explanation until they were alone in the duchess's boudoir, when she said that to call Weisspriess a gallant man was an instance of unblushing adulation of brutal strength: "Gallant for slaying a boy? Gallant because he has force of wrist?"

"Yes; gallant;—an honour to his countrymen; and an example to some of yours," Amalia rejoined.

"See," cried Laura, "to what a degeneracy your excess of national sentiment reduces you!"

While she was flowing on, the duchess leaned a hand across her shoulder, and smiling kindly, said she would not allow her to utter words that she would have to eat. You saw my chasseur step up to me this evening, my Laura? Well, not to torment you, he wished to sound an alarm cry after Angelo Guidascarpì. I believe my conjecture is correct, that Angelo Guidascarpì was seen by Major Weisspriess below, and allowed to pass free. Have you no remark to make?"

"None," said Laura.

“You cannot admit that he behaved like a gallant man?”

Laura sighed deeply. “Perhaps it was as well for you to encourage him!”

The mystery of Angelo’s interview with Weisspriess was cleared the next night, when in the midst of a ball-room’s din, Aennchen, Amalia’s favourite maid, brought a letter to Laura from Countess Ammiani. These were the contents:—

“DEAREST SIGNORA,

“You now learn a new and blessed thing. God make the marriage fruitful! I have daughter as well as son. Our Carlo still hesitated, for hearing of the disgraceful rumours in Milan, he fancied a duty lay there for him to do. Another menace came to my daughter from the madman Barto Rizzo. God can use madmen to bring about the heavenly designs. We decided that Carlo’s name should cover her. My son was like a man who has awakened up. M. Powys was our good genius. He told her that he had promised you to bring it about. He, and Angelo, and myself, were the witnesses. So much before Heaven! I crossed the lake with them to Stresa. I was her tirewoman, with Giacinta, to whom I will give a husband for the tears of joy she dropped

upon the bed. Blessed be it! I placed my daughter in my Carlo's arms. Both kissed their mother at parting.

"This is something fixed. I had great fears during the war. You do not yet know what it is to have a sonless son in peril. Terror and remorse haunted me for having sent the last Ammiani out to those fields, unattached to posterity.

"An envelope from Milan arrived on the morning of his nuptials. It was intercepted by me. The German made a second appointment at Como. Angelo undertook to assist me in saving my son's honour. So my Carlo had nothing to disturb his day. Pray with me, Laura Piaveni, that the day and the night of it may prove fresh springs of a river that shall pass our name through the happier mornings of Italy! I commend you to God, my dear, and am your friend,

"MARCELLINA, COUNTESS AMMIANI.

"P.S. Countess Alessandra will be my daughter's name."

The letter was read and re-read before the sweeter burden it contained would allow Laura to understand that Countess Ammiani had violated a seal and kept a second hostile appointment hidden from her son.

“Amalia, you detest me,” she said, when they had left the guests for a short space, and the duchess had perused the letter, “but acknowledge Angelo Guidascarpì’s devotion. He came here in the midst of you Germans, at the risk of his life, to offer battle for his cousin.”

The duchess, however, had much more to say for the magnanimity of Major Weisspriess, who, if he saw him, had spared him; she compelled Laura to confess that Weisspriess must have behaved with some nobleness, which Laura did, humming and ‘brumming,’ and hinting at the experience he had gained of Angelo’s skill. Her naughtiness provoked first, and then affected Amalia; in this mood the duchess had the habit of putting on a grand air of pitying sadness. Laura knew it well, and never could make head against it. She wavered, as a stray floating thing detached from an eddy whirls and passes on the flood. Close on Amalia’s bosom she sobbed out: “Yes; you Austrians have good qualities—some: many! but you choose to think us mean because we can’t readily admit them when we are under your heels. Just see me; what a crumb feeds me! I am crying with delight at a marriage!”

The duchess clasped her fondly.

“It’s not often one gets you so humble, my Laura.”

“I am crying with delight at a marriage! Amalia, look at me: you would suppose it a mighty triumph. A marriage!—two little lovers lying cheek to cheek! and me blessing heaven for its goodness! and there may be dead men unburied still on the accursed Custoza hill-top!”

Amalia let her weep. The soft affection which the duchess bore towards her was informed with a slight touch of envy of a complexion that could be torn with tears one minute, and the next be fit to show in public. No other thing made her regard her friend as a southern—that is, a foreign—woman.

“Be patient,” Laura said.

“Cry; you need not be restrained,” said Amalia.

“You sighed.”

“No!”

“A sort of sigh. My fit’s over. Carlo’s marriage is too surprising and delicious. I shall be laughing presently. I hinted at his marriage—I thought it among the list of possible things, no more—to see if that crystal pool, called Violetta d’Isorella, could be discoloured by stirring. Did you watch her face? I don’t know what she wanted with Carlo, for she’s cold as poison—a female trifler; one of those women whom I, and I have a chaste body, despise as worse than wantons; but she certainly did not want him to

be married. It seems like a victory—though we're beaten. You have beaten us, my dear!”

“ My darling! it is your husband kisses you,” said Amalia, kissing Laura's forehead from a full heart.

CHAPTER XL.

THROUGH THE WINTER.

WEISSPRIESS and Wilfrid made their way towards Milan together, silently smoking, after one attempt at conversation, which touched on Vittoria's marriage; but when they reached Monza the officer slapped his degraded brother-in-arms upon the shoulder, and asked him whether he had any inclination to crave permission to serve in Hungary. For his own part, Weisspriess said that he should quit Italy at once; he had here to skewer the poor devils, one or two weekly, or to play the mightily generous; in short, to do things unsoldierly; and he was desirous of getting away from the country. General Schöneck was at Monza, and might arrange the matter for them both. Promotion was to be looked for in Hungary; the application would please the general; one battle would restore the lieutenant's

star to Wilfrid's collar. Wilfrid, who had been offended by his companion's previous brooding silence, nodded briefly, and they stopped at Monza, where they saw General Schöneck in the morning, and Wilfrid being by extraordinary favour in civilian's dress during his leave of absence, they were jointly invited to the general's table at noon, though not to meet any other officer. General Schöneck agreed with Weisspriess that Hungary would be a better field for Wilfrid; said he would do his utmost to serve them in the manner they wished, and dismissed them after the second cigar. They strolled about the city, glad for reasons of their own to be out of Milan as long as the leave permitted. At night, when they were passing a palace in one of the dark streets, a feather, accompanied by a sharp sibilation from above, dropped on Wilfrid's face. Weisspriess held the feather up, and judged by its length that it was an eagle's, and therefore belonging to the Hungarian Hussar regiment stationed in Milan. "The bird's aloft," he remarked. His voice aroused a noise of feet that was instantly still. He sent a glance at the doorways, where he thought he discerned men. Fetching a whistle in with his breath, he unsheathed his sword, and seeing that Wilfrid had no weapon, he pushed him to a gate of the palace-

court that had just cautiously turned a hinge. Wilfrid found his hand taken by a woman's hand inside. The gate closed behind him. He was led up to an apartment where, by the light of a darkly-veiled lamp, he beheld a young Hungarian officer and a lady clinging to his neck, praying him not to go forth. Her Italian speech revealed how matters stood in this house. The officer accosted Wilfrid: "But you are not one of us!" He repeated it to the lady: "You see, the man is not one of us!"

She assured him that she had seen the uniform when she dropped the feather, and wept protesting it.

"Louis, Louis! why did you come to-night! why did I make you come! You will be slain. I had my warning, but I was mad."

The officer hushed her with a quick squeeze of her intertangled fingers.

"Are you the man to take a sword and be at my back, sir?" he said; and resumed in a manner less contemptuous towards the civil costume: "I request it for the sole purpose of quieting this lady's fears."

Wilfrid explained who and what he was. On hearing that he was General Pierson's nephew the officer laughed cheerfully, and lifted the veil from

the lamp, by which Wilfrid knew him to be Colonel Prince Radocky, a most gallant and the handsomest cavalier in the imperial service. Radocky laughed again when he was told of Weisspriess keeping guard below.

“Aha! we are three, and can fight like a pyramid.”

He flourished his hand above the lady's head, and called for a sword. The lady affected to search for one while he stalked up and down in the jaunty fashion of a Magyar horseman; but the sword was not to be discovered without his assistance, and he was led away in search of it. The moment he was alone Wilfrid burst into tears. He could bear anything better than the sight of fondling lovers. When they rejoined him, Radocky had evidently yielded some point; he stammered and worked his under-lip on his moustache. The lady undertook to speak for him. Happily for her, she said, Wilfrid would not compromise her; and taking her lover's hand, she added with Italian mixture of wit and grace:—

“Happily for me, too, he does. The house is surrounded by enemies; it is a reign of terror for women. I am dead, if they slay him; but if they recognise him, I am lost.”

Wilfrid readily leaped to her conclusion. He

offered his opera-hat and civil mantle to Radocky, who departed in them, leaving his military cloak in exchange. During breathless seconds the lady hung kneeling at the window. When the gate opened there was the noise as of feet preparing to rush; Weisspriess uttered an astonished cry, but addressed Radocky as "my Pierson!" lustily and frequently; and was heard putting a number of meaningless questions, laughing and rallying Pierson till the two passed out of hearing unmolested. The lady then kissed a Cross passionately, and shivered Wilfrid's manhood by asking him whether he knew what love was. She went on:

"Never, never love a married woman! It's a past practice. Never! Thrust a spike in the palm of your hand; drink scalding oil, rather than do that."

"The Prince Radocky is now safe," Wilfrid said.

"Yes, he is safe; and he is there, and I am here: and I cannot follow him; and when will he come to me?"

The tones were lamentable. She struck her forehead, after she had mutely thrust her hand to right and left to show the space separating her from her lover.

Her voice changed when she accepted Wilfrid's adieux, to whose fate in the deadly street she ap-

peared quite indifferent, though she gave him one or two prudent directions, and expressed a hope that she might be of service to him.

He was set upon as soon as he emerged from the gateway ; the cavalry cloak was torn from his back, and but for the chance circumstance of his swearing in English, he would have come to harm. A chill went through his blood on hearing one of his assailants speak the name of Barto Rizzo. The English oath stopped an arm that flashed a dagger half its length. Wilfrid obeyed a command to declare his name, his country, and his rank. "It's not the prince! it's not the Hungarian!" went many whispers ; and he was drawn apart by a man who requested him to deliver his reasons for entering the palace, and who appeared satisfied by Wilfrid's ready mixture of invention and fact. But the cloak ! Wilfrid stated boldly that the cloak was taken by him from the Duchess of Graätli's at Como ; that he had seen a tall Hussar officer slip it off his shoulders ; that he had wanted a cloak, and had appropriated it. He had entered the gate of the palace because of a woman's hand that plucked at the skirts of this very cloak.

"I saw you enter," said the man ; "do that no more. We will not have the blood of Italy contami-

nated — do you hear? While that half-Austrian Medole is tip-toeing 'twixt Milan and Turin, we watch over his honour, to set an example to our women and your officers. You have outwitted us to-night. Off with you!”

Wilfrid was twirled and pushed through the crowd till he got free of them. He understood very well that they were magnanimous rascals who could let an accomplice go, though they would have driven steel into the principal.

Nothing came of this adventure for some time. Wilfrid's reflections—apart from the horrible hard truth of Vittoria's marriage, against which he dashed his heart perpetually, almost asking for anguish—had leisure to examine the singularity of his feeling a commencement of pride in the clasp of his musket;—he who on the first day of his degradation had planned schemes to stick the bayonet-point between his breast-bones;—he thought as well of the queer woman's way in Countess Medole's adjuration to him that he should never love a married woman;—in her speaking, as it seemed, on his behalf, when it was but an outcry of her own acute wound. Did he love a married woman? He wanted to see one married woman for the last time; to throw a frightful look on her; to be sublime in his scorn of her; per-

haps to love her all the better for the cruel pain, in the expectation of being consoled. While doing duty as a military machine, these were the pictures in his mind; and so well did his routine drudgery enable him to bear them, that when he heard from General Schöneck that the term of his degradation was to continue in Italy, and from his sister that General Pierson refused to speak of him or hear of him until he had regained his gold shoulder-strap, he revolted her with an ejaculation of gladness, and swore brutally that he desired to have no advancement; nothing but sleep and drill; and, he added conscientiously, Havannah cigars. "He has grown to be like a common soldier," Adela said to herself with an amazed contemplation of the family tie. Still, she worked on his behalf, having, as every woman has, too strong an instinct as to what is natural to us to believe completely in any eccentric assertion. She carried the tale of his grief and trials and his romantic devotion to the imperial flag, daily to Countess Lena; persisting, though she could not win a responsive look from Lena's face.

One day on the review-ground, Wilfrid beheld Prince Radocky bending from his saddle in conversation with Weisspriess. The prince galloped up to General Pierson, and stretched his hand to where

Wilfrid was posted as marker to a wheeling column, kept the hand stretched out, and spoke furiously, and followed the general till he was ordered to head his regiment. Wilfrid began to hug his musket less desperately. Little presents—feminine he knew by the perfumes floating round them—gloves and cigars, fine handkerchiefs, and silks for wear, came to his barracks. He pretended to accuse his sister of sending them. She in honest delight accused Lena. Lena then accused herself of not having done so. It was winter ; Vittoria had been seen in Milan. Both Lena and Wilfrid spontaneously guessed her to be the guilty one. He made a funeral pyre of the gifts and gave his sister the ashes, supposing that she had guessed with the same spirited intuition. It suited Adela to relate this lover's performance to Lena. "He did well!" Lena said, and kissed Adela for the first time. Adela was the bearer of friendly messages to the poor private in the ranks. From her and from little Jenna, Wilfrid heard that he was forgotten by Countess Lena, and new hopes mingled with gratitude caused him to regard his situation seriously. He confessed to his sister that the filthy fellows, his comrades, were all but too much for him, and asked her to kiss him, that he might feel he was not one of them. But he would not send a message

in reply to Lena. "That is also well!" Lena said. Her brother Karl was a favourite with General Pierson. She proposed that Adela and herself should go to Count Karl, and urge him to use his influence with the general. This, however, Adela was disinclined to do; she could not apparently say why. When Lena went to him, she was astonished to hear that he knew every stage of her advance up to the point of pardoning her erratic lover; and even knew as much as that Wilfrid's dejected countenance on the night when Vittoria's marriage was published in the saloon of the duchess on Lake Como, had given her fresh offence. He told her that many powerful advocates were doing their best for the down-fallen officer, who, if he were shot, or killed, would still be gazetted an officer. "A nice comfort!" said Lena, and there was a rallying exchange of banter between them, out of which she drew the curious discovery that Karl had one of his strong admirations for the English lady. "Surely!" she said to herself; "I thought they were all so cold." And cold enough the English lady seemed when Lena led to the theme. "Do I admire your brother, Countess Lena? Oh! yes;—in his uniform exceedingly."

Milan was now full. Wilfrid had heard from Adela that Count Ammiani and his bride were in

the city and were strictly watched. Why did not conspirators like these two take advantage of the amnesty? Why were they not in Rome? Their chief was in Rome; their friends were in Rome. Why were they here? A report, coming from Countess d'Isorella, said that they had quarrelled with their friends, and were living for love alone. As she visited the Lenkensteins—high Austrians—some believed her; and as Count Ammiani and his bride had visited the Duchess of Graätli, it was thought possible. Adela had refused to see Vittoria; she did not even know the house where Count Ammiani dwelt; so Wilfrid was reduced to find it for himself. Every hour when off duty the miserable sentimentalist wandered in that direction, nursing the pangs of a delicious tragedy of emotions; he was like a drunkard going to his draught. As soon as he had reached the head of the Corso, he wheeled and marched away from it with a lofty head, internally grinning at his abject folly, and marvelling at the stiff figure of an Austrian common soldier which flashed by the windows as he passed. He who can unite prudence and madness, sagacity and stupidity, is the true buffoon; nor, vindictive as were his sensations, was Wilfrid unaware of the contrast of Vittoria's soul to his own, that was now

made up of antics. He could not endure the tones of cathedral music; but he had at times to kneel and listen to it, and be overcome.

On a night in the month of February, a servant out of livery addressed him at the barrack-gates, requesting him to go at once to a certain hotel, where his sister was staying. He went, and found there, not his sister, but Countess Medole. She smiled at his confusion. Both she and the prince, she said, had spared no effort to get him reinstated in his rank; but his uncle continually opposed the endeavours of all his friends to serve him. This interview was dictated by the prince's wish, so that he might know them to be a not ungrateful couple. Wilfrid's embarrassment in standing before a lady in private soldier's uniform, enabled him with very peculiar dignity to declare that his present degradation, from the general's point of view, was a just punishment, and he did not crave to have it abated. She remarked that it must end soon. He made a dim allusion to the littleness of humanity. She laughed. "It's the language of an unfortunate lover," she said, and straightway, in some undistinguished sentence, brought the name of Countess Alessandra Ammiani tingling to his ears. She feared that she could not be of service to him there;

“at least, not just yet,” the lady astonished him by remarking. “I might help you to see her. If you take my advice you will wait patiently. You know us well enough to understand what patience will do. She is supposed to have married for love. Whether she did or not, you must allow a young married woman two years’ grace.”

The effect of speech like this, and more in a similar strain of frank corruptness, was to cleanse Wilfrid’s mind, and nerve his heart, and he denied that he had any desire to meet the Countess Ammiani, unless he could perform a service that would be agreeable to her.

The lady shrugged. “Well, that is one way. She has enemies, of course.”

Wilfrid begged for their names.

“Who are they not?” she replied. “Chiefly women, it is true.”

He begged most earnestly for their names; he would have pleaded eloquently, but dreaded that the intonation of one in his low garb might be taken for a whine; yet he ventured to say that if the countess did imagine herself indebted to him in a small degree, the mention of two or three of the names of Countess Alessandra Ammiani’s enemies would satisfy him.

“Countess Lena von Lenkenstein, Countess Violetta d’Isorella, Signorina Irma di Karski.”

She spoke the names out like a sum that she was paying down in gold pieces, and immediately rang the bell for her servant and carriage, as if she had now acquitted her debt. Wilfrid bowed himself forth. A resolution of the best kind, quite unconnected with his interests or his love, urged him on straight to the house of the Lenkensteins, where he sent up his name to Countess Lena. After a delay of many minutes, Count Lenkenstein accompanied by General Pierson came down, both evidently affecting not to see him. The general barely acknowledged his salute.

“Hey! Kinsky!” The count turned in the doorway to address him by the title of his regiment; “here; show me the house inhabited by the Countess d’Isorella during the revolt.”

Wilfrid followed them to the end of the street, pointing his finger to the house, and saluted.

“An Englishman did me the favour—from pure eccentricity, of course—to save my life on that exact spot, general,” said the count. “Your countrymen usually take the other side; therefore I mention it.”

As Wilfrid was directing his steps to barracks (the little stir to his pride superinduced by these remarks

having demoralised him), Count Lenkenstein shouted: "Are you off duty?" Wilfrid had nearly replied that he was, but just mastered himself in time. "No, indeed!" said the count, "when you have sent up your name to a lady." This time General Pier-son put two fingers formally to his cap, and smiled grimly at the private's rigid figure of attention. If Wilfrid's form of pride had consented to let him take delight in the fact, he would have seen at once that prosperity was ready to shine on him. He nursed the vexations much too tenderly to give prosperity a welcome; and even when alone with Lena, and convinced of her attachment, and glad of it, he persisted in driving at the subject which had brought him to her house; so that the veil of opening commonplaces, pleasant to a couple in their position, was plucked aside. His business was to ask her why she was the enemy of Countess Alessandra Ammiani, and to entreat her that she should not seek to harm that lady. He put it in a set speech. Lena felt that it ought to have come last, not in advance of their reconciliation. "I will answer you," she said. "I am not the Countess Alessandra Ammiani's enemy."

He asked her: "Could you be her friend?"

"Does a woman who has a husband want a friend?"

“I could reply, countess, in the case of a man who has a bride.”

By dint of a sweet suggestion here and there, love-making crossed the topic. It appeared that General Pierson had finally been attacked, on the question of his resistance to every endeavour to restore Wilfrid to his rank by Count Lenkenstein, and had barely spoken the words—that if Wilfrid came to Countess Lena of his own free-will, unprompted, to beg her forgiveness, he would help to reinstate him, when Wilfrid’s name was brought up by the chasseur. All had laughed, “even I,” Lena confessed. And then the couple had a pleasant pettish wrangle;—he was requested to avow that he had come solely, or principally, to beg forgiveness of her, who had such heaps to forgive. No; on his honour, he had come for the purpose previously stated, and on the spur of his hearing that she was Countess Alessandra Ammiani’s deadly enemy. “Could you believe that I was?” said Lena; “why should I be?” and he coloured like a lad, which sign of an ingenuousness supposed to belong to her sex, made Lena bold to take the upper hand. She frankly accused herself of jealousy, though she did not say of whom. She almost admitted that when the time for reflection came, she should rejoice at his having sought her to

plead for his friend rather than for her forgiveness. In the end, but with a drooping pause of her bright swift look at Wilfrid, she promised to assist him in defeating any machinations against Vittoria's happiness, and to keep him informed of Countess d'Isorella's movements. Wilfrid noticed the withdrawing fire of the look. "By heaven! she doubts me still," he ejaculated inwardly.

These half-comic little people have their place in the history of higher natures and darker destinies. Wilfrid met Pericles, from whom he heard that Vittoria, with her husband's consent, had pledged herself to sing publicly. "It is for ze Lombard widows," Pericles apologised on her behalf; "but, do you see, I onnly want a beginning. She thaerst for ze stage; and it is, after marriage, a good sign. Oh! you shall hear, my friend; marriage have done her no hurt—ze contrary! You shall hear Hymen—Cupids—not a cold machine; it is an organ alaif! She has privily sung to her Pericles, and sèr, and if I wake not very late on Judgment-Day, I shall zen hear—but why should I talk poetry to you, to make you laugh? I have a divin' passion for zat woman. Do I not give her to a husband, and say, Be happy! onnly sing! Be kissed! be hugged! onnly give Pericles your voice. By Saint Alexandre! it is

to say to ze heavens, Move on your way, so long as you drop rain on us—you smile—you look kind.”

Pericles accompanied him into a caffè, the picture of an enamoured happy man. He waved aside contemptuously all mention of Vittoria's having enemies. She had them when, as a virgin, she had no sense. As a woman, she had none, for she now had sense. Had she not brought her husband to be sensible, so that they moved together in Milanese society, instead of stupidly fighting at Rome? so that what he could not take to himself—the marvellous voice—he let bless the multitude! “She is the Beethoven of singers,” Pericles concluded. Wilfrid thought so on the night when she sang to succour the Lombard widows. It was at a concert, richly thronged; ostentatiously thronged with Austrian uniforms. He fancied that he could not bear to look on her. He left the house thinking that to hear her and see her and feel that she was one upon the earth, made life less of a burden.

This evening was rendered remarkable by a man's calling out, “You are a traitress!” while Vittoria stood before the seats. She became pale, and her eyelids closed. No thinness was subsequently heard in her voice. The man was caught as he strove to burst through the crowd at the entrance-door, and

proved to be a petty bookseller of Milan, by name, Sarpò, known as an orderly citizen. When taken he was inflamed with liquor. Next day the man was handed from the civil to the military authorities, he having confessed to the existence of a plot in the city. Pericles came fuming to Wilfrid's quarters. Wilfrid gathered from him that Sarpò's general confession had been retracted: it was too foolish to snare the credulity of Austrian officials. Sarpò stated that he had fabricated the story of a plot, in order to escape the persecutions of a terrible man, and find safety in prison lodgings *under government*. The short confinement for a civic offence was not his idea of safety; he desired to be sheltered by Austrian soldiers and a fortress, and said that his torments were insupportable while Barto Rizzo was at large. This infamous republican had latterly been living in his house, eating his bread, and threatening death to him unless he obeyed every command. Sarpò had undertaken his last mission for the purpose of supplying his lack of resolution to release himself from his horrible servitude by any other means; not from personal animosity towards the Countess Alessandra Ammiani, known as la Vittoria. When seized, fear had urged him to escape. Such was his second story. The points seemed irreconcilable to those

who were not in the habit of taking human nature into their calculations of a possible course of conduct; even Wilfrid, though he was aware that Barto Rizzo hated Vittoria inveterately, imagined Sarpo's first lie to have necessarily fathered a second. But the second story was true; and the something like lover's wrath with which the outrage to Vittoria fired Pericles, prompted him to act on it as truth. He told Wilfrid that he should summon Barto Rizzo to his presence. As the government was unable to exhibit so much power, Wilfrid looked sarcastic; whereupon Pericles threw up his chin crying: "Oh! you shall know my resources. Now, my friend, one bit of paper, and a messenger, and then home to my house, to Tokay and cigarettes, and wait to see." He remarked after pencilling a few lines, "Countess d'Isorella is her enemy? hein!"

"Why, you wouldn't listen to me when I told you," said Wilfrid.

"No," Pericles replied while writing and humming over his pencil; "my ear is a pelican-pouch, my friend; it—and Irma is her enemy also?—it takes and keeps, but does not swallow till it wants. I shall hear you, and I shall hear my Sandra Vittoria, and I shall not know you have spoken, when by-and-by 'tinkle, tinkle,' a bell of my brain, and your word

walks in,—‘quite well?’—‘very well!’—‘sit down’—‘if it is ze same to you, I prefer to stand’—‘good; zen, I examine you.’ My motto:—‘Time opens ze gates:’ my system:—it is your doctor of regiment’s system when your twelve, fifteen, forty recruits strip to him:—‘Ah! you, my man, have varicose vein: no soldier in our regiment, you!’ So on. Perhaps I am not intelligible; but, hear zis. I speak not often of my money; but I say—it is in your ear—a man of millions, he is a king!” The Greek jumped up and folded a couple of notes. “I will not have her disturbed. Let her sing now and a while to Pericles and his public; and to ze Londoners, wiz your permission, Count Ammiani, one saison. I ask no more, and I am satisfied, and I endow your oldest child, signor Conte—it is said! For its mamma was a good girl, a brave girl; she troubled Pericles, because he is an intellect; but he forgives when he sees sincerity—rare zing! Sincerity and genius: it may be zey are as man and wife in a bosom. He forgives; it is not jonnly voice he craves, but a soul, and Sandra, your countess, she has a soul—I am not a Turk. I say, it is a woman in whom a girl I did see a soul! A woman when she is married, she is part of ze man; but a soul, it is for ever alone, apart, confounded wiz nobody! For

it I followed Sandra, your countess. It was a sublime devotion of a dog. Her voice thrilled, her soul possessed me. Your countess is my Sandra still. I shall be pleased if child-bearing trouble her not more than a very little; but, enfin! she is married, and you and I, my friend Wilfrid, we must accept the decree, and say, No harm to her out of the way of nature, by Saint Nicolas! or any what saint you choose for your invocation. Come along. And speed my letters by one of your militaires at once off. Are Pericles' millions gold of bad mint? If so, he is an incapable. He presumes it is not so. Come along; we will drink to her in essence of Tokay. You shall witness two scenes. Away!"

Wilfrid was barely to be roused from his fit of brooding into which Pericles had thrown him. He sent the letters, and begged to be left to sleep. The image of Vittoria seen through this man's mind was new, and brought a new round of torments. "The devil take you," he cried when Pericles plucked at his arm, "I've sent the letters; isn't that enough?" He was bitterly jealous of the Greek's philosophic review of the conditions of Vittoria's marriage; for when he had come away from the concert, not a thought of her being a wife had clouded his resignation to the fact. He went with Pericles, nevertheless.

and was compelled to acknowledge the kindling powers of the essence of Tokay. "Where do you get this stuff?" he asked several times. Pericles chattered of England, and Hagar's 'Addio,' and 'Camilla.' What cabinet operas would he not give! What entertainments! Could an emperor offer such festivities to his subjects? Was a field review equal to Vittoria's voice? He stung Wilfrid's ears by insisting on the mellowed depth, the soft human warmth, which marriage had lent to the voice. At a late hour his valet announced Countess d'Isorella. "Did I not say so?" cried Pericles, and corrected himself: "No, I did not say so; it was a surprise to you, my friend. You shall see; you shall hear. Now you shall see what a friend Pericles can be when a person satisfy him." He pushed Wilfrid into his dressing-room, and immediately received the countess with an outburst of brutal invectives—pulling her up and down the ranked regiment of her misdeeds, as it were. She tried dignity, tried anger, she affected amazement, she petitioned for the heads of his accusations, and, as nothing stopped him, she turned to go. Pericles laughed when she had left the room. Irma di Karski was announced the next minute, and Countess d'Isorella re-appeared beside her. Irma had a similar

greeting. "I am lost," she exclaimed. "Yes, you are lost," said Pericles; "a word from me, and the back of the public is humped at you—ha! contessa, you touched Mdlle. Irma's hand? She is to be on her guard, and never to think she is lost till down she goes? You are a more experienced woman! I tell you I will have no nonsense. I am Countess Alessandra Ammiani's friend. You two, you women, are her enemies. I will ruin you both. You would prevent her singing in public places—you, Countess d'Isorella, because you do not forgive her marriage to Count Ammiani; you, Irma, to spite her for her voice. You would hiss her out of hearing, you two miserable creatures. Not another soldo for you! Not one! and to-morrow, countess, I will see my lawyer. Irma, begone, and shriek to your wardrobe! Countess d'Isorella, I have the extreme honour."

Wilfrid marvelled to hear this titled and lovely woman speaking almost in tones of humility in reply to such outrageous insolence. She craved a private interview. Irma was temporarily expelled, and then Violetta stooped to ask what the Greek's reason for his behaviour could be. She admitted that it was in his power to ruin her, as far as money went. "Perhaps a little farther," said Pericles; "say two steps. If one is on a precipice, two steps count for some-

thing." But, what had she done? Pericles refused to declare it. This set her guessing with a charming naïveté. Pericles called Irma back to assist her in the task, and quitted them that they might consult together and hit upon the right thing. His object was to send his valet for Luigi Saracco. He had seen that no truth could be extracted from these women, save forcibly. Unaware that he had gone out, Wilfrid listened long enough to hear Irma say, between sobs: "Oh! I shall throw myself upon his mercy. Oh, Countess d'Isorella, why did you lead me to think of vengeance! I am lost! He knows everything. Oh, what is it to me whether she lives with her husband! Let them go on plotting. I am not the government. I am sure I don't much dislike her. Yes, I hate her, but why should I hurt myself? She will wear those jewels on her forehead; she will wear that necklace with the big amethysts, and pretend she's humble because she doesn't carry earrings, when her ears have never been pierced! I am lost! Yes, you may say, look up! I am only a poor singer, and he can ruin me. Oh! Countess d'Isorella, oh! what a fearful punishment. If Countess Anna should betray Count Ammiani to-night, nothing, nothing, will save me. I will confess. Let us both be beforehand with her—or you, it does not matter for a noble lady."

“Hush!” said Violetta. “What dreadful fool is this I sit with? You may have done what you think of doing already.”

She walked to the staircase door, and to that of the suite. An honourable sentiment, conjoined to the knowledge that he had heard sufficient, induced Wilfrid to pass on into the sleeping apartment a moment or so before Violetta took this precaution. The potent liquor of Pericles had deprived him of consecutive ideas; he sat nursing a thunder in his head, imagining it to be profound thought, till Pericles flung the door open. Violetta and Irma had departed. “Behold! I have it; ze address of your rogue, Barto Rizzo,” said Pericles, in the manner of one whose triumph is absolutely due to his own shrewdness. “Are two women a match for me? Now, my friend, you shall see. Barto Rizzo is too clever for zis government, which cannot catch him. I catch him, and I teach him he may touch politics—it is not for him to touch art. What! to hound men to interrupt her while she sings in public places? What next? But I knew my Countess d’Isorella could help me, and so I sent for her to confront Irma, and dare to say she knew not Barto’s dwelling—and why? I will tell you a secret. A long-flattered woman, my friend, she has had, you will think,

enough of it; no! she is like avarice. If it is worship of swine, she cannot refuse it. Barto Rizzo worships her; so it is a deduction—she knows his abode—I act upon that, and I arrive at my end. I now send him to ze devil.”

Barto Rizzo, after having evaded the Polizia of the city during a three months' steady chase, was effectually captured on the doorstep of Vittoria's house in the Corso Francesco, by gendarmes whom Pericles had set on his track. A day later Vittoria was stabbed at about the same hour, on the same spot. A woman dealt the blow. Vittoria was returning from an afternoon drive with Laura Piaveni and the children. She saw a woman seated on the steps as beggarwomen sit, face in lap. Anxious to shield her from the lacquey, she sent the two little ones up to her with small bits of money. But, as the woman would not lift her head, she and Laura prepared to pass her, Laura coming last. The blow, like all such unexpected incidents, had the effect of lightning on those present; the woman might have escaped, but after she had struck she sat down impassive as a cat by the hearth, with a round-eyed stare.

The news that Vittoria had been assassinated traversed the city. Carlo was in Turin, Merthyr in Rome. Pericles was one of the first who reached

the house ; he was coming out when Wilfrid and the Duchess of Graätli drove up ; and he accused the Countess d'Isorella flatly of having instigated the murder. He was frantic. They supposed that she must have succumbed to the wound. The duchess sent for Laura. There was a press of carriages and soft-humming people in the street ; many women and men sobbing. Wilfrid had to wait an hour for the duchess, who brought comfort when she came. Her first words were reassuring. " Ah ! " she said, " did I not do well to make you drive here with me instead of with Lena ? Those eyes of yours would be unpardonable to her. Yes, indeed ; though a corpse were lying in this house : but Countess Alessandra is safe. I have seen her. I have held her hand."

Wilfrid kissed the duchess's hand passionately.

What she had said of Lena was true : Lena could only be generous upon the after-thought ; and when the duchess drove Wilfrid back to her, he had to submit to hear scorn and indignation against all Italians, who were denounced as cut-throats, and worse and worse and worse, males and females alike. This was grounded on her sympathy for Vittoria. But Wilfrid now felt towards the Italians through his remembrance of that devoted soul's love of them,

and with one direct look he bade his betrothed good-by, and they parted.

It was in the early days of March that Merthyr, then among the Republicans of Rome, heard from Laura Piaveni. Two letters reached him, one telling of the attempted assassination, and a second explaining circumstances connected with it. The first summoned him to Milan; the other left it to his option to make the journey. He started, carrying kind messages from the chief to Vittoria, and from Luciano Romara the offer of a renewal of old friendship to Count Ammiani. His political object was to persuade the Lombard youth to turn their whole strength upon Rome. The desire of his heart was again to see her, who had been so nearly lost to all eyes for ever.

Laura's first letter stated brief facts. "She was stabbed this afternoon, at half-past two, on the steps of her house, by a woman called the wife of Barto Rizzo. She caught her hands up under her throat when she saw the dagger. Her right arm was penetrated just above the wrist, and half an inch in the left breast, close to the centre bone. She behaved firmly. The assassin only struck once. No visible danger; but you should come, if you have no serious work."

“Happily,” ran the subsequent letter, of two days’ later date, “the assassin was a woman, and one effort exhausts a woman; she struck only once, and became idiotic. Sandra has no fever. She had her wits ready—where were mine?—when she received the wound. While I had her in my arms, she gave orders that the woman should be driven out of the city in her carriage. The Greek, her mad musical adorer, accuses Countess d’Isorella. Carlo has seen this person—returns convinced of her innocence. That is not an accepted proof; but we have one. It seems that Rizzo (Sandra was secret about it and about one or two other things) sent to her commanding her to appoint an hour—detestable style! I can see it now; I fear these conspiracies no longer:—she did appoint an hour; and was awaiting him when the gendarmes sprang on the man at her door. He had evaded them several weeks, so we are to fancy that his wife charged Countess Alessandra with the betrayal. This appears a reasonable and simple way of accounting for the deed. So I only partly give credit to it. But it may be true.

“The wound has not produced a shock to her system—very very fortunately. On the whole, a better thing could not have happened. Should I be

more explicit? Yes, to you; for you are not of those who see too much in what is barely said. The wound, then, my dear good friend, has healed another wound, of which I knew nothing. Bergamasc and Brescian friends of her husband's, have imagined that she interrupted or *diverted his studies*. He also discovered that she had an opinion of her own, and sometimes he consulted it; but alas! they are lovers, and he knew not when love listened, or she when love spoke; and there was grave business to be done meanwhile. Can you kindly allow that the case was open to a little confusion? I know that you will. He had to hear many violent reproaches from his *fellow-students*. These have ceased. I send this letter on the chance of the first being lost on the road; and it will supplement the first pleasantly to you in any event. She lies here in the room where I write, propped on high pillows, the right arm bound up, and says: 'Tell Merthyr I prayed to be in Rome with my husband, and him, and the chief. Tell him I love my friend. Tell him I think he deserves to be in Rome. Tell him' — Enter Countess Ammiani to reprove her for endangering the hopes of the house by fatiguing herself. Sandra sends a blush at me, and I smile, and the countess kisses her. I send you a literal

transcript of one short scene, so that you may feel at home with us.

“There is a place called Venice, and there is a place called Rome, and both places are pretty places and famous places ; and there is a thing called the fashion ; and these pretty places and famous places set the fashion ; and there is a place called Milan, and a place called Bergamo, and a place called Brescia, and they all want to follow the fashion, for they are giddy-pated baggages. What is the fashion, mamma ? The fashion, my dear, is &c. &c. &c. :— Extract of lecture to my little daughter Amalia, who says she forgets you ; but Giacomo sends his manly love. Oh, good God ! should I have blood in my lips when I kissed him, if I knew that he was old enough to go out with a sword in his hand a week hence ? I seem every day to be growing more and more *all mother*. This month in front of us is full of thunder. Addio !”

When Merthyr stood in sight of Milan an army was issuing from the gates.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE INTERVIEW.

MERTHYR saw Laura first. He thought that Vittoria must be lying on her couch; but Laura simply figured her arm in a sling, and signified, more than said, that Vittoria was well and taking the air. She then begged hungrily for news of Rome, and again of Rome, and sat with her hands clasped in her lap to listen. She mentioned Venice in a short breath of praise, as if her spirit could not repose there. Rome, its hospitals, its municipal arrangements, the names of the triumvirs, the prospects of the city, the edicts, the aspects of the streets, the popularity of the government, the number of volunteers ranked under the magical republic—of these things Merthyr talked, at her continual instigation, till, stopping abruptly, he asked her if she wished to divert him from any painful subject. “No, no!” she cried, “it’s only that

I want to feel an anchor. We are all adrift. Sandra is in perfect health. Our bodies, dear Merthyr, are enjoying the perfection of comfort. Nothing is done here except to keep us from boiling over."

"Why does not Count Ammiani come to Rome?" said Merthyr.

"Why are we not all in Rome? Yes, why! why! We should make a carnival of our own if we were."

"She would have escaped that horrible knife," Merthyr sighed.

"Yes, she would have escaped that horrible knife. But, see the difference between Milan and Rome, my friend! It was a blessed knife here. It has given her husband back to her; it has destroyed the intrigues against her. It seems to have been sent—I was kneeling in the cathedral this morning, and had the very image crossing my eyes—from the saints of heaven to cut the black knot. Perhaps it may be the means of sending us to Rome."

Laura paused, and, looking at him, said, "It is so utterly impossible for us women to comprehend love without folly in a man; the trait by which we recognize it! Merthyr, you dear Englishman, *you* shall know everything. Do we not think a tisane a weak, washy drink, when we are strong? But we learn, when we lie with our chins up, and our ten toes like

stopped organ-pipes—as Sandra says—we learn then that it means fresh health and activity, and is better than rivers of your fiery wines. You love her, do you not?”

The question came with great simplicity.

“If I can give a proof of it, I am ready to answer,” said Merthyr, in some surprise.

“Your whole life is the proof of it. The women of your country are intolerable to me, Merthyr; but I do see the worth of the men. Sandra has taught me. She can think of you, talk of you, kiss the vision of you, and still be a faithful woman in our bondage of flesh; and to us you know what a bondage it is. How can that be? I should have asked, if I had not seen it. Dearest, she loves her husband, and she loves you. She has two husbands, and she turns to the husband of her spirit when that, or any, dagger strikes her bosom. Carlo has an unripe mind. They have been married but a little more than four months; and he reveres her and loves her.” Laura’s voice dragged. “Multiply the months by thousands, we shall not make those two lives one. Is it the curse of man’s education in Italy? He can see that she has wits and courage. He will not consent to make use of them. You know her: she is not one to talk of these things. She, who has both

heart and judgment—she is merely a little boat tied to a big ship. Such is their marriage. She cannot influence him. She is not allowed to advise him. And she is the one who should lead the way. And if she did, we should now be within sight of the city.”

Laura took his hand. She found it moist, though his face was calm and his chest heaved regularly. An impish form of the pity women feel for us at times moved her to say, “Your skin is as bronzed as it was last year. Sandra spoke of it. She compared it to a young vine-leaf. I wonder whether girls have really an admonition of what is good for them while they are going their ways like destined machines?”

“Almost all men are of flesh and blood,” said Merthyr, softly.

“I spoke of girls.”

“I speak of men.”

“Blunt-witted that I am! Of course you did. But do not imagine that she is not happy with her husband. They are united firmly.”

“The better for her, and him, and me,” said Merthyr.

Laura twisted an end of her scarf with fretful fingers. “Carlo Albert has crossed the Ticino?”

“Is about to do so,” Merthyr rejoined.

“Will Rome hold on if he is defeated?”

“Rome has nothing to fear on that side.”

“But you do not speak hopefully of Rome.”

“I suppose I am thinking of other matters.”

“You confess it!”

The random conversation wearied him. His foot tapped the floor.

“Why do you say that?” he asked.

“Verily, for no other reason than that I have a wicked curiosity, and that you come from Rome,” said Laura, now perfectly frank, and believing that she had explained her enigmatical talk, if she had not furnished an excuse for it. Merthyr came from the city which was now encircled by an irradiating halo in her imagination, and a fit of spontaneous inexplicable feminine tenderness being upon her at the moment of their meeting, she found herself on a sudden prompted to touch and probe and brood voluptuously over an unfortunate lover’s feelings, supposing that they existed. For the glory of Rome was on him, and she was at the same time angry with Carlo Ammiani. It was the form of passion her dedicated widowhood could still be subject to in its youth; the sole one. By this chance Merthyr learnt what nothing else would have told him.

Her tale of the attempted assassination was related

with palpable indifference. She stated the facts. "The woman seemed to gasp while she had her hand up; she struck with no force; and she has since been inanimate, I hear. The doctor says that a spasm of the heart seized her when she was about to strike. It has been shaken—I am not sure that he does not say displaced, or unseated—by some one of her black tempers. She shot Rinaldo Guidascarpì dead. Perhaps it was that. I am informed that she worshipped the poor boy, and has been like a trapped she-wolf since she did it. In some way she associated our darling with Rinaldo's death, like the brute she is. The ostensible ground for her futile bit of devilishness was that she fancied Sandra to have betrayed Barto Rizzo, her husband, into the hands of the Polizia. He wrote to the Countess Alessandra—such a letter!—a curiosity!—he must see her and cross-examine her to satisfy himself that she was a true patriot, &c. You know the style: we neither of us like it. Sandra was waiting to receive him when they pounced on him by the door. Next day the woman struck at her. Decidedly a handsome woman. She is the exact contrast to the Countess Violetta in face, in everything. Heart-disease will certainly never affect that pretty spy! But, mark," pursued Laura, warming, "when Carlo arrived, tears,

penitence, heaps of self-accusations: he had been unkind to her even on Lake Orta, where they passed their golden month; he had neglected her at Turin; he had spoken angry words in Milan; in fact, he had misused his treasure, and begged pardon;—‘If you please, my poor bleeding angel, I am sorry. But do not, I entreat, distract me with petitions of any sort, though I will perform anything earthly to satisfy you. Be a good little boat in the wake of the big ship. I will look over at you, and chirrup now and then to you, my dearest, when I am not engaged in piloting extraordinary.’—Very well; I do not mean to sneer at the unhappy boy, Merthyr; I love him; he was my husband’s brother-in-arms; the sweetest lad ever seen. He is in the season of faults. He must command; he must be a chief; he fancies he can intrigue—poor thing! It will pass. And so will the hour to be forward to Rome. But I call your attention to this: when he heard of the dagger—I have it from Colonel Corte, who was with him at the time in Turin—he cried out Violetta d’Isorella’s name. Why? After he had buried his head an hour on Sandra’s pillow, he went straight to Countess d’Isorella, and was absent till night. The woman is hideous to me. No; don’t conceive that I think her Sandra’s rival. She is too jealous. She

has him in some web. If she has not ruined him, she will. She was under my eyes the night she heard of his marriage: I saw how she will look at seventy. Here is Carlo at the head of a plot she has prepared for him; and he has Angelo Guidascarpi, and Ugo Corte, Marco Sana, Giulio Bandinelli, and about fifty others. They have all been kept away from Rome by that detestable—— you object to hear bad names cast on women, Merthyr. Hear Agostino! The poor old man comes daily to this house to persuade Carlo to lead his band to Rome. It is so clearly Rome—Rome, where all his comrades are; where the chief stand must be made by the side of Italy's chief. Worst sign of all, it has been hinted semi-officially to Carlo that he may upon application be permitted to re-issue his journal. Does not that show that the government wishes to blindfold him, and keep him here, and knows his plans?"

Laura started up as the door opened, and Vittoria appeared leaning upon Carlo's arm. Countess Ammiani, Countess d'Isorella, and Pericles were behind them. Laura's children followed.

When Merthyr rose, Vittoria was smiling in Carlo's face at something that had been spoken. She was pale, and her arm was in a sling, but there was no appearance of her being unnerved or depressed.

Merthyr waited for her recognition. She turned her eyes from Carlo slowly. The soft dull smile in them died out as it were with a throb, and then her head drooped on one shoulder, and she sank to the floor.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SHADOW OF CONSPIRACY.

MERTHYR left the house at Laura's whispered suggestion. He was agitated beyond control, for Vittoria had fallen with her eyes fixed on him; and at times the picture of his beloved, her husband, and Countess Ammiani, and the children bending over her still body, swam before him like a dark altar-piece floating in incense, so lost was he to the reality of that scene. He did not hear Beppo, his old servant, at his heels. After awhile he walked calmly, and Beppo came up beside him. Merthyr shook his hand.

"Ah, Signor Mertyr! ah, padrone!" said Beppo.

Merthyr directed his observation to a regiment of Austrians marching down the Corso Venezia to the Ticinese gate.

"Yes, they are ready enough for us," Beppo remarked. "Perhaps Carlo Alberto will beat them

this time. If he does, viva to him! If they beat him, down goes another Venetian pyramid. The Countess Alessandra——” Beppo’s speech failed.

“What of your mistress?” said Merthyr.

“When she dies, my dear master, there’s no one for me but the Madonna to serve.”

“Why should she die, silly fellow?”

“Because she never cries.”

Merthyr was on the point of saying, “Why should she cry?” His heart was too full, and he shrank from inquisitive shadows of the thing known to him.

“Sit down at this caffè with me,” he said. “It’s fine weather for March. The troops will camp comfortably. Those Hungarians never require tents. Did you see much sacking of villages last year?”

“Padrone, the Imperial command is always to spare the villages.”

“That’s humane.”

“Padrone, yes; if policy is humanity.”

“It’s humanity not carried quite as far as we should wish it.”

Beppo shrugged and said: “It won’t leave much upon the conscience if we kill them.”

“Do you expect a rising?” said Merthyr.

“If the Ticino overflows, it will flood Milan,” was the answer.

“And your occupation now is to watch the height of the water?”

“My occupation, padrone? I am not on the watch-tower.” Beppo winked, adding: “I have my occupation.” He threw off the effort or pretence to be discreet. “Master of my soul! this is my occupation. I drink coffee, but I do not smoke, because I have to kiss a pretty girl, who means to object to the smell of the smoke. Via! I know her! At five she draws me into the house.”

“Are you relating your amours to me, rascal?” Merthyr interposed.

“Padrone, at five precisely she draws me into the house. She is a German girl. Pardon me if I make no war on women! Her name is Aennchen, which one is able to say if one grimaces;—why not? It makes her laugh; and German girls are amiable when one can make them laugh. ’Tis so that they begin to melt. Behold the difference of races! I must kiss her to melt her, and then have a quarrel. I could have it after the first, or the fiftieth with an Italian girl; but my task will be excessively difficult with a German girl, if I am compelled to allow myself to favour her with one happy solicitation for a kiss, to commence with. We shall see. It is, as my abstention from tobacco declares, an anticipated catastrophe.”

“Long-worded, long-winded, obscure, affirmatising by negatives, confessing by implication!—where’s the beginning and end of you, and what’s your meaning?” said Merthyr, who talked to him as one may talk to an Italian servant.

“The contessa, my mistress, has enemies. Padrone, I devote myself to her service.”

“By making love to a lady’s-maid?”

“Padrone, a rat is not born to find his way up the grand staircase. She has enemies. One of them was the sublime Barto Rizzo—admirable, though I must hate him. He said to his wife: ‘If a thing happens to me, stab to the heart the Countess Alessandra Ammiani.’”

“Inform me how you know that?” said Merthyr.

Beppo pointed to his head, and Merthyr smiled. To imagine, invent, and believe, were spontaneous with Beppo when his practical sagacity was not on the stretch. He glanced at the caffè clock.

“Padrone, at eleven to-night shall I see you here? At eleven I shall come like a charged cannon. I have business. I have seen my mistress’s blood! I will tell you: this German girl lets me know that some one detests my mistress. Who? I am off to discover. But who is the damned creature? I must coo and kiss, while my toes are dancing on hot plates,

to find her out. Who is she? If she were half Milan . . .”

His hands waved in outline the remainder of the speech, and he rose, but sat again. He had caught sight of the spy, Luigi Saracco, addressing the signor Antonio-Pericles in his carriage. Pericles drove on. The horses presently turned, and he saluted Merthyr.

“She has but one friend in Milan : it is myself,” was his introductory remark. “My poor child ! my dear Powys, she is the best—‘I cannot sing to you to-day, dear Pericles’—she said that after she had opened her eyes ; after the first mist, you know. She is the best child upon earth. I could wish she were a devil, my Powys. Such a voice should be in an iron body. But she has immense health. The doctor, who is also mine, feels her pulse. He assures me it goes as Time himself, and Time, my friend, you know, has the intention of going a great way. She is good : she is too good. She makes a baby of Pericles, to whom what is woman? Have I not the sex in my pocket? Her husband, he is a fool, sèr.” Pericles broke thundering into a sentence of English, fell in love with it, and resumed in the same tongue : “I—it is I zat am her guard, her safety. Her husband—oh ! she must marry a young man,

little donkey zat she is! We accept it as a destiny, my Powys. And he plays false to her. Good; I do not object. But, imagine in your own mind, my Powys—instead of passion, of rage, of tempest, she is frozen wiz a repose. Do you sink, hein? it will come out,”—Pericles eyed Merthyr with a subtle smile askew,—“I have sot so;—it will come out when she is one day in a terrible scene . . . Mon Dieu! it was a terrible scene for me when I looked on ze clout zat washed ze blood of ze terrible assassination. So goes out a voice, possibly! Divine, you say? We are a machine. Now, you behold, she has fainted. It may happen at my concert where she sings to-morrow night. You saw me in my carriage speaking to a man. He is my spy—my dog wiz a nose. I have set him upon a woman. If zat woman has a plot for to-morrow night to spoil my concert, she shall not know where she shall wake to-morrow morning after. Ha! here is military music—twenty sossand doors jam on horrid hinges; and right, left, right, left, to it, confound! like dolls all wiz one face. Look at your soldiers, Powys. Put zem on a stage, and you see all background people—a bawling chorus. It shows to you how superior it is—a stage to life! A stage shall prove your excellency. Life is humbug to a tune of drum and brass, all fools in front. Hark

to its music ! I cannot stand it ; I am driven away ; I am violent ; I rage.”

Pericles howled the name of his place of residence, with an offer of lodgings in it, and was carried off writhing his body as he passed a fine military marching band.

The figure of old Agostino Balderini stood in front of Merthyr. They exchanged greetings. At the mention of Rome, Agostino frowned impatiently. He spoke of Vittoria in two or three short exclamations, and was about to speak of Carlo, but checked his tongue. “Judge for yourself. Come, and see, and approve, if you can. Will you come ? There’s a meeting ; there’s to be a resolution. Question—Shall we second the King of Sardinia, Piedmont, and Savoy ? If so, let us set this pumpkin, called Milan, on its legs. I shall be an attentive listener, like you, my friend. I speak no more.”

Merthyr went with him to the house of a carpenter, where in one of the uppermost chambers communicating with the roof, Ugo Corte, Marco Sana, Giulio Bandinelli, and others, sat waiting for the arrival of Carlo Ammiani ; when he came Carlo had to bear with the looks of mastiffs for being late. He shook Merthyr’s hand hurriedly, and as soon as the door was fastened, began to speak. His first sentence

brought a grunt of derision from Ugo Corte. It declared that there was no hope of a rising in Milan. Carlo swung round upon the Bergamasc. "Observe our leader," Agostino whispered to Merthyr; "it would be kindness to give him a duel." More than one tumult of outcries had to be stilled before Merthyr gathered any notion of the designs of the persons present. Bergamasc sneered at Brescian, and both united in contempt of the Milanese, who, having a burden on their minds, appealed at once to their individual willingness to use the sword in vindication of Milan against its traducers. By a great effort, Carlo got some self-mastery. He admitted, colouring horribly, that Brescia and Bergamo were ready, and Milan was not; therefore those noble cities (he read excerpts from letters showing their readiness) were to take the lead, and thither on the morrow-night he would go, let the tidings from the king's army be what they might.

Merthyr quitted the place rather impressed by his eloquence, but unfavourably by his feverish look. Countess d'Isorella had been referred to as one who served the cause ably and faithfully. In alluding to her, Carlo bit his lip; he did not proceed until surrounding murmurs of satisfaction encouraged him to continue a sort of formal eulogy of the lady, which

proved to be a defence against foregone charges, for Corte retracted an accusation, and said that he had no fault to find with the countess. A proposition to join the enterprise was put to Merthyr, but his engagement with the chief in Rome saved him from hearing much of the marvellous facilities of the plot. "I should have wished to see you to-night," Carlo said as they were parting. Merthyr named his hotel. Carlo nodded. "My wife is still slightly feeble," he said.

"I regret it," Merthyr rejoined.

"She is not ill."

"No, it cannot be want of courage," Merthyr spoke at random.

"Yes, that's true," said Carlo, as vacantly. "You will see her while I am travelling."

"I hope to find the Countess Alessandra well enough to receive me."

"Always; always," said Carlo, wishing apparently to say more. Merthyr waited an instant, but Carlo broke into a conventional smile of adieu.

"While he is *travelling*," Merthyr repeated to Agostino, who had stood by during the brief dialogue, and led the way to the Corso.

"He did not say how far!" was the old man's ejaculation.

"But, good heaven! if you think he's on an unfortunate errand, why don't you stop him, advise him?" Merthyr broke out.

"Advise him! stop him! my friend. I would advise him, if I had the patience of angels; stop him, if I had the power of Lucifer. Did you not see that he shunned speaking to me? I have been such a perpetual dish of vinegar under his nose for the last month, that the poor fellow sniffs when I draw near. He must go his way. He leads a torrent that must sweep him on. Corte, Sana, and the rest, would be in Rome now, but for him. So should I. Your Agostino, however, is not of Bergamo, or of Brescia; he is not a madman; simply a poor rheumatic Piedmontese, who discerns the point where a united Italy may fix its standard. I would start for Rome to-morrow, if I could leave her—my soul's child!" Agostino raised his hand: "I do love the woman, Countess Alessandra Ammiani. I say, she is a peerless woman. Is she not?"

"There is none like her," said Merthyr.

"A peerless woman, recognised and sacrificed! I cannot leave her. If the government here would lay hands on Carlo and do their worst at once, I would be off. They are too wary. I believe that they are luring him to his ruin. I can give no

proofs, but I judge by the best evidence. What avails my telling him? I lose my temper the moment I begin to speak. A curst witch beguiles the handsome idiot—poor darling lad that he is! She has him—can I tell you how? She has got him—got him fast! The nature of the chains are doubtless innocent, if those which a woman throws round us be ever distinguishable. He loves his wife—he is not a monster.”

“He appears desperately feverish,” said Merthyr.

“Did you not notice it? Yes, like a man pushed by his destiny out of the path. He is ashamed to hesitate; he cannot turn back. Ahead of him he sees a gulf. That army of Carlo Alberto may do something under its Pole. Prophecy is too easy. I say no more. We *may* have Lombardy open; and if so, my poor boy’s vanity will be crowned: he will only have the king and his army against him then.”

Discoursing in this wise, they reached the caffè where Beppo had appointed to meet his old master, and sat amid, here and there, a whitecoat, and many nods and whispers over such news as the privileged journals and the official gazette afforded.

Beppo’s destination was to the Duchess of Graätli’s palace. Nearing it, he perceived Luigi endeavouring to gain a passage beside the burly form of Jacob

Baumwalder Feckelwitz, who presently seized him and hurled him into the road. As Beppo was sidling up the courtway, Jacob sprang back; Luigi made a rush; Jacob caught them both, but they wriggled out of his clutch, and Luigi, being the fearfulest, ran the farthest. While he was out of hearing, Beppo told Jacob to keep watch upon Luigi, as the bearer of an amorous letter from a signor of quality to Aennchen, the which he himself desired to obtain sight of; "for the wench has caused me three sleepless nights," he confessed frankly. Jacob affected not to understand. Luigi and Beppo now leaned against the wall on either side of him and baited him till he shook with rage. "He is the lord of the duchess, his mistress—what a lucky fellow!" said Luigi. "When he's dog at the gates no one can approach her. When he isn't, you can fancy what!" "He's only a mechanical contrivance; he's not a man," said Beppo. "He's the principal flea-catcher of the palace," said Luigi; "here he is all day, and at night the devil knows where he hunts."—Luigi hopped in a half-circle round the exacerbad Jacob, and finally provoked an assault that gave an opening to Beppo. They all ran in, Luigi last. Jacob chased Beppo up the stairs, lost him, and remembered what he had said of the letter borne by Luigi, for whom he deter-

mined to lie in waiting. "Better two in there than one," he thought. The two courted his Aennchen openly; but Luigi, as the bearer of an amorous letter from the signor of quality, who could be no other than the signor Antonio-Pericles, was the one to be intercepted. Like other jealous lovers, Jacob wanted to read Aennchen's answer to be cured of his fatal passion for the maiden, and on this he set the entire force of his mind.

Running up by different staircases, Beppo and Luigi came upon Aennchen nearly at the same time. She turned a cold face on Beppo, and requested Luigi to follow her. Astonished to see him in such favour, Beppo was ready to provoke the quarrel before the kiss when she returned; but she said that she had obeyed her mistress's orders, and was obeying the duchess in refusing to speak of them, or of anything relating to them. She had promised him an interview in that little room leading into the duchess's boudoir. He pressed her to conduct him. "Ah; then it's not for me you come," she said. Beppo had calculated that the kiss would open his way to the room, and the quarrel disembarass him of his pretty companion when there. "You have come to listen to conversation again," said Aennchen. "Ach! the fool a woman is to think that you

Italians have any idea except self-interest when you, when you . . . talk nonsense to us. Go away, if you please. Good evening." She dropped a curtsy with a surly coquetry, charming of its kind. Beppo protested that the room was dear to him because there first he had known for one blissful half-second the sweetness of her mouth.

"Who told you that persons who don't like your mistress are going to talk in there?" said Aennchen.

"You," said Beppo.

Aennchen drew up in triumph: "And now will you pretend that you didn't come up here to go in there to listen to what they say?"

Beppo clapped hands at her cleverness in trapping him. "Hush," said all her limbs and features, belying the previous formal 'good-evening.' He refused to be silent, thinking it a way of getting to the little ante-chamber. "Then, I tell you, down-stairs you go," said Aennchen, stiffly.

"Is it decided?" Beppo asked. "Then, good-evening. You detestable German girls can't love. One step—a smile; another step—a kiss. You tit-for-tat minx! Have you no notion of the sacredness of the sentiments which inspires me to petition that the place for our interview should be there where I tasted ecstatic joy for the space of a flash of light-

ning? I will go ; but it is there that I will go, and I will await you there, Signorina Aennchen. Yes, laugh at me ! laugh at me !”

“No ; really, I don’t laugh at you, Signor Beppo,” said Aennchen, protesting in denial of what she was doing. “This way.”

“No, it’s that way,” said Beppo.

“It’s through here.” She opened a door. “The duchess has a reception to-night, and you can’t go round. Ach ! you would not betray me ?”

“Not if it were the duchess herself,” said Beppo ; he would refuse to satisfy man’s natural vanity in such a case.

Eager to advance to the little ante-chamber, he allowed Aennchen to wait behind him. He heard the door shut and a lock turn, and he was in the dark, and alone, left to take counsel of his fingers’ ends.

“She was born to it,” Beppo remarked, to extenuate his outwitted cunning, when he found each door of the room fast against him.

On the following night Vittoria was to sing at a concert in the Duchess of Graätli’s greet saloon, and the duchess had humoured Pericles by consenting to his preposterous request that his spy should have an opportunity of hearing Countess d’Isorella and Irma di Karski in private conversation together, to dis-

cover whether there was any plot of any sort to vex the evening's entertainment; as the jealous spite of those two women, Pericles said, was equal to any devilry on earth. It happened that Countess d'Isorella did not come. Luigi, in despair, was the hearer of a quick question and answer dialogue, in the obscure German tongue, between Anna Von Lenkenstein and Irma di Karski; but a happy peep between the hanging curtains gave him sight of a letter passing from Anna's hands to Irma's. Anna quitted her. Irma was looking at the superscription of the letter, in the act of passing in her steps, when Luigi tore the curtains apart, and sprang on her arm like a cat. Before her shrieks could bring succour, Luigi was bounding across the court with the letter in his possession. A dreadful hug awaited him; his pockets were ransacked, and he was pitched aching into the street. Jacob Baumwalder Fackelwitz went straightway under a gas-lamp, where he read the address of the letter to Countess d'Isorella. He doubted; he had a half-desire to tear the letter open. But a rumour of the attack upon Irma had spread among the domestics, and Jacob prudently went up to his mistress. The duchess was sitting with Laura. She received the letter, eyed it all over, and held it to a candle. Laura's head was bent in dark

meditation. The sudden increase of light aroused her, and she asked, "What is that?"

"A letter from Countess Anna to Countess d'Isorella," said the duchess.

"Burnt!" Laura screamed.

"It's only fair," the duchess remarked.

"From her to that woman! It may be priceless. Stop! Let me see what remains. Amalia! are you mad? Oh! you false friend. I would have sacrificed my right hand to see it."

"Try and love me still," said the duchess, letting her take one unburnt corner, and crumble the black tissuey fragments to smut in her hands.

There was no writing; the unburnt corner of the letter was a blank.

Laura fooled the wretched ashes between her palms. "Good-night," she said. "Your face will be of this colour to me, my dear, for long."

"I cannot behave disgracefully, even to keep your love, my beloved," said the duchess.

"You cannot betray a German, you mean," Laura retorted. "You could let a spy into the house."

"That was a childish matter—merely to satisfy a whim."

"I say you could let a spy into the house. Who is to know where the scruples of you women begin?"

I would have given my jewels, my head, my husband's sword, for a sight of that letter. I swear that it concerns us. Yes, *us*. You are a false friend. Fish-blooded creature! may it be a year before I look on you again. Hide among your miserable set!"

"Judge me when you are cooler, dearest," said the duchess, seeking to detain the impetuous sister of her affection by the sweeping skirts; but Laura spurned her touch, and went from her.

Irma drove to Countess d'Isorella's. Violetta was abed, and lay fair and placid as a Titian Venus, while Irma sputtered out her tale, with intermittent sobs. She rose upon her elbow, and planting it in her pillow, took half-a-dozen puffs of a cigarette, and then requested Irma to ring for her maid. "Do nothing till you see me again," she said; "and take my advice: always get to bed before midnight, or you'll have unmanageable wrinkles in a couple of years. If you had been in bed at a prudent hour to-night, this scandal would not have occurred."

"How can I be in bed? How could I help it?" moaned Irma, replying to the abstract rule, and the perplexing illustration of its force.

Violetta dismissed her. "After all, my wish is to save my poor Amaranto," she mused. "I am only

doing now what I should have been doing in the daylight; and if I can't stop him, the government must; and they will. Whatever the letter contained, I can anticipate it. He knows my profession and my necessities. I must have money. Why not from the rich German woman whom he jilted?"

She attributed Anna's apparent passion of revenge to a secret passion of unrequited love. What else was implied by her willingness to part with land and money for the key to his machinations?

Violetta would have understood a revenge directed against Angelo Guidascarpì, as the slayer of Anna's brother. But of him Anna had only inquired once, and carelessly, whether he was in Milan. Anna's mystical semi-patriotism—prompted by her hatred of Vittoria, hatred of Carlo as Angelo's cousin and protector, hatred of the Italy which held the three, who never took the name *Tedesco* on their tongues without loathing—was perfectly hidden from this shrewd head.

Some extra patrols were in the streets. As she stepped into the carriage, a man rushed up, speaking hoarsely and inarticulately, and jumped in beside her. She had discerned Barto Rizzo in time to give directions to her footman, before she was addressed by a body of gendarmes in pursuit, whom she

mystified by entreating them to enter her house and search it through, if they supposed that any evil-doer had taken advantage of the open door. They informed her that a man had escaped from the civil prison. "Poor creature!" said the countess, with womanly pity; "but you must see that he is not in my house. How could three of you let one escape?" She drove off laughing at their vehement assertion that he would not have escaped from them. Barto Rizzo made her conduct him to Countess Ammiani's gates. Violetta was frightened by his eyes when she tried to persuade him in her best coaxing manner to avoid Count Ammiani. In fact she apprehended that he would be very much in her way. She had no time for chagrin at her loss of power over him, though she was sensible of vexation. Barto folded his arms and sat with his head in his chest, silent, till they reached the gates, when he said in French, "Madame, I am a nameless person in your train. Gabble!" he added, when the countess advised him not to enter; nor would he allow her to precede him by more than one step. Violetta sent up her name. The man had shaken her nerves. "At least, remember that your appearance should be decent," she said, catching sight of blood on his hands, and torn garments. "I expect, madame," he replied, "I

shall not have time to wash before I am laid out. My time is short. I want tobacco. The washing can be done by-and-by, but not the smoking."

They were ushered up to the reception-room, where Countess Ammiani, Vittoria, and Carlo sat, awaiting the visitor whose unexpected name, cast in their midst at so troubled a season, had clothed her with some of the midnight's terrors.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE LAST MEETING IN MILAN.

BARTO RIZZO had silence about him without having to ask for it, when he followed Violetta into Countess Ammiani's saloon of reception. Carlo was leaning over his mother's chair, holding Vittoria's wrist across it, and so enclosing her, while both young faces were raised to the bowed forehead of the countess. They stood up. Violetta broke through the formal superlatives of an Italian greeting. "Speak to me alone," she murmured for Carlo's ear; and glancing at Barto: "Here is a madman; a mild one, I trust." She contrived to show that she was not responsible for his intrusion. Countess Ammiani gathered Vittoria in her arms; Carlo stepped a pace before them. Terror was on the venerable lady's face, wrath on her son's. As he fronted Barto, he motioned a finger to the curtain hangings, and Violetta, quick at read-

ing signs, found his bare sword there. "But you will not want it," she remarked, handing the hilt to him, and softly eyeing the impression of her warm touch on the steel as it passed.

"Carlo, thou son of Paolo! Countess Marcellina, wife of a true patriot! stand aside, both of you. It is between the Countess Alessandra and myself," so the man commenced, with his usual pomp of interjection. "Swords and big eyes—are they things to stop me?" Barto laughed scornfully. He had spoken in the full roll of his voice, and the sword was hard back for the thrust.

Vittoria disengaged herself from the countess. "Speak to me," she said, dismayed by the look of what seemed an exaltation of madness in Barto's visage, but firm as far as the trembling of her limbs would let her be.

He dropped to her feet and kissed them.

"Emilia Alessandra Belloni! Vittoria! Countess Alessandra Ammiani! pity me. Hear this:—I hated you as the devil is hated. Yesterday I woke up in prison to hear that I must adore you. God of all the pits of punishment! was there ever one like this? I had to change heads."

It was the language of a distorted mind, and lamentable to hear when a sob shattered his voice.

“Am I mad?” he asked piteously, clasping his temples.

“You are as we are, if you weep,” said Vittoria, to soothe him.

“Then I have *been* mad!” he cried, starting. “I knew you a wicked virgin—signora contessa, confess to me, marriage has changed you. Has it not changed you? In the name of the Father of the Saints, help me out of it:—my brain wheels backwards. You were false, but marriage—it acts in this way with you women; yes, that we know—you were married, and you said, ‘Now let us be faithful.’ Did you not say that? I am forgiving, though none think it. You have only to confess. If you will not,—oh!” He smote his face, groaning.

Carlo spoke a stern word in an undertone, counselling him to be gone.

“If you will not—what was she to do?” Barto cut the question to interrogate his strayed wits. “Look at me, Countess Alessandra. I was in the prison. I heard that my Rosellina had a tight heart. She cried for her master, poor heathen, and I sprang out of the walls to her. There—there—she lay like a breathing board; a woman with a body like a coffin half alive; not an eye to show; nothing but a body and a whisper. She perished righteously, for she

disobeyed. She acted without my orders: she dared to think! She will be damned, for she would have vengeance before she went. She glorified you over me—over Barto Rizzo. Oh! she shocked my soul. But she is dead, and I am her slave. Every word was of you. Take another head, Barto Rizzo: your old one was mad: she said that to my soul. She died blessing you above me. I saw the last bit of life go up from her mouth blessing you. It's heard by this time in heaven, and it's written. Then I have had two years of madness. If she is right, I was wrong; I was a devil of hell. I know there's an eye given to dying creatures, and she looked with it, and she said, the soul of Rinaldo Guidascarpì, her angel, was glorifying you; and she thanked the sticking of her heart, when she tried to stab you, poor fool!"

Carlo interrupted: "Now go; you have said enough."

"No, let him speak," said Vittoria. She supposed that Barto was going to say that he had not given the order for her assassination. "You do not wish me dead, signore?"

"Nothing that is not standing in my way, signora contessa," said Barto; and his features blazed with a smile of happy self-justification. "I have killed a sentinel this night: Providence placed him there.

I wish for no death, but I punish, and—ah ! the cursed sight of the woman who calls me mad for two years. She thrusts a bar of iron in an engine at work, and says, Work on ! work on ! Were you not a traitress ? Countess Alessandra, were you not once a traitress ? Oh ! confess it ; save my head. Reflect, dear lady ! it's cruel to make a man of a saintly sincerity look back—I count the months—seventeen months ! to look back seventeen months, and see that his tongue was a clapper,—his will, his eyes, his ears, all about him, everything, stirred like a pot on the fire. I traced you. I saw your treachery. I said—I, *I* am her Day of Judgment. She shall look on me and perish, struck down by her own treachery. Were my senses false to me ? I have lived in virtuous fidelity to my principles. None can accuse me. Why were my senses false, if my principles were true ? I said you were a traitress. I saw it from the first. I had the divine contempt for women. My distrust of a woman was the eye of this brain, and I said—Follow her, dog her, find her out ! I proved her false ; but her devilish cunning deceived every other man in the world. Oh ! let me bellow, for it's me she proves the mass of corruption ! To-morrow I die, and if I am mad now, what sort of a curse is that ? Now to-morrow is an hour—a laugh !

But if I've not been shot from a true bow—if I've been a sham for two years—if my name, and nature, and bones and brains were all false things hunting a shadow, Countess Alessandra, see the misery of Barto Rizzo! Look at those two years, and say that I had my head. Answer me, as you love your husband: are you heart and soul with him in the fresh fight for Lombardy?"

He said this with a look penetrating and malignant, and then by a sudden flash pitifully entreating.

Carlo feared to provoke, revolted from the thought of slaying him. "Yes, yes," he interposed, "my wife is heart and soul in it. Go."

Barto looked from him to her with the eyes of a dog that awaits an order.

Vittoria gathered her strength, and said:

"I am not."

"It is her answer!" Barto roared, and from deep dejection his whole countenance radiated. "She says it—she might give the lie to a saint! I was never mad. I saw the spot, and put my finger on it, and not a madman can do that. My two years are my own. Mad now, for, see! I worship the creature. She is not heart and soul in it. She is not in it at all. She is a little woman, a lovely thing, a toy, a cantatrice. Joy to the big heart of Barto Rizzo! I am for Brescia!"

He flung his arm like a banner, and ran out.

Carlo laid his sword on a table Vittoria's head was on his mother's bosom.

The hour was too full of imminent grief for either of the three to regard this scene as other than a gross intrusion ended.

"Why did you deny my words?" Carlo said coldly.

"I could not lie to make him wretched," she replied in a low murmur.

"Do you know what that 'I am for Brescia' means? He goes to stir the city before a soul is ready."

"I warned you that I should speak the truth of myself to-night, dearest."

"You should discern between speaking truth to a madman, and to a man."

Vittoria did not lift her eyes, and Carlo beckoned to Violetta, with whom he left the room.

"He is angry," Countess Ammiani murmured. "My child, you cannot deal with men in a fever unless you learn to dissemble; and there is exemption for doing it, both in plain sense, and in our religion. If I could arrest him, I would speak boldly. It is, alas! vain to dream of that; and it is therefore an unkindness to cause him irritation. Carlo has given way to you by allowing you to be here when his

friends assemble. He knows your intention to speak. He has done more than would have been permitted by my husband to me, though I too was well-beloved."

Vittoria continued silent that her head might be cherished where it lay. She was roused from a stupor by hearing new voices. Laura's lips came pressing to her cheek. Colonel Corte, Agostino, Marco Sana, and Angelo Guidascarpì, saluted her. Angelo she kissed.

"That lady should be abed and asleep," Corte was heard to say.

The remark passed without notice. Angelo talked apart with Vittoria. He had seen the dying of the woman whose hand had been checked in the act of striking by the very passion of animal hatred which raised it. He spoke of her affectionately, attesting to the fact that Barto Rizzo had not prompted her guilt. Vittoria moaned at a short outline that he gave of the last minutes between those two, in which her name was dreadfully and fatally, incomprehensibly prominent.

All were waiting impatiently for Carlo's return.

When he appeared he led Vittoria before the men—with some touch of scenic irony, as Agostino

thought, for it was foreign to his habitual manner—and presented the person to whom they were indebted. Violetta coloured, but kept her composure.

“Countess Violetta will do us the honour to take her chamber in this house till I start,” Carlo whispered to his mother.

Violetta stooped to intercede, and Countess Ammiani lent her a more willing ear.

“She would like to go to it immediately,” said Carlo; whereupon his mother rose, and the two ladies withdrew in the stiff way that women have when they move under constraint.

Agostino slapped his shoulder, calling him Duke of Ferrara, and a name or two of the princely domestic tyrants.

It was a meeting for the final disposition of things before the outbreak. Carlo had begun to speak when Corte drew his attention to the fact that ladies were present, at which Carlo put out his hand as if introducing them, and went on speaking.

“Your wife is here,” said Corte.

“My wife and Signora Piaveni,” Carlo rejoined. “I have consented to my wife’s particular wish to be present.”

“The Signora Piaveni’s opinions are known; your wife’s are not.”

"Countess Alessandra shares mine," said Laura, rather tremulously.

Countess Ammiani at the same time returned and took Vittoria's hand and pressed it with force. Carlo looked at them both.

"I have to ask your excuses, gentlemen. My wife, my mother, and Signora Piaveni, have served the cause we worship sufficiently to claim a right—I am sorry to use such phrases; you understand my meaning. Permit them to remain. I have to tell you that Barto Rizzo has been here: he has started for Brescia. I should have had to kill him to stop him—a measure that I did not undertake."

"Being your duty!" remarked Corte.

Agostino corrected him with a sarcasm.

"I cannot allow the presence of ladies to exclude a comment on manifest indifference," said Corte.

"Pass on to the details, if you have any."

"The details are these," Carlo resumed, too proud to show a shade of self-command; "my cousin Angelo leaves Milan before morning. You, Colonel Corte, will be in Bergamo at noon to-morrow. Marco and Angelo will await my coming in Brescia, where we shall find Giulio and the rest. I join them at five on the following afternoon, and my arrival signals

the revolt. We have decided that the news from the king's army is good."

A perceptible shudder in Vittoria's frame at this concluding sentence caught Corte's eye.

"Are you dissatisfied with that arrangement?" he addressed her boldly.

"I am, Colonel Corte," she replied. So simple was the answering tone of her voice that Corte had not a word.

"It is my husband who is going," Vittoria spoke on steadily; "him I am prepared to sacrifice, as I am myself. If he thinks it right to throw himself into Brescia, nothing is left for me but to thank him for having done me the honour to consult me. His will is firm. I trust to God that he is wise. I look on him now as one of many brave men whose lives belong to Italy, and if they all are misdirected and perish, we have no more; we are lost. The King is on the Ticino; the Chief is in Rome. I desire to entreat you to take counsel before you act in anticipation of the king's fortune. I see that it is a crushed life in Lombardy. In Rome there is one who can lead and govern. He has suffered and is calm. He calls to you to strengthen his hands. My prayer to you is to take counsel. I know the hour is late; but it is not too late for wisdom. Forgive me

if I am not speaking humbly. Brescia is but Brescia; Rome is Italy. I have understood little of my country until these last days, though I have both talked and sung of her glories. I know that a deep duty binds you to Bergamo and to Brescia—poor Milan we must not think of. You are not personally pledged to Rome: yet Rome may have the greatest claims on you. The heart of our country is beginning to beat there. Colonel Corte! Signor Marco! my Agostino! my cousin Angelo! it is not a woman asking for the safety of her husband, but one of the blood of Italy who begs to offer you her voice, without seeking to disturb your judgment.”

She ceased.

“Without seeking to disturb their judgment!” cried Laura. “Why not, when the judgment is in error?”

To Laura’s fiery temperament Vittoria’s speech had been feebleness. She was insensible to that which the men felt conveyed to them by the absence of emotion in the language of a woman so sorrowfully placed. “Wait,” she said, “wait for the news from Carlo Alberto, if you determine to play at swords and guns in narrow streets.” She spoke long and vehemently, using irony, coarse and fine, with the eloquence which was her gift. In conclusion she

apostrophised Colonel Corte as one who had loved him might have done. He was indeed that figure of indomitable strength to which her spirit, exhausted by intensity of passion, clung more than to any other on earth, though she did not love him, scarcely liked him.

Corte asked her curiously—for she had surprised and vexed his softer side—why she distinguished him with such remarkable phrases only to declare her contempt for him.

“It’s the flag whipping the flag-pole,” murmured Agostino ; and he now spoke briefly in support of the expedition to Rome ; or at least in favour of delay until the King of Sardinia had gained a battle. While he was speaking, Merthyr entered the room, and behind him a messenger who brought word that Bergamo had risen.

The men drew hurriedly together, and Countess Ammiani, Vittoria, and Laura stood ready to leave them.

“You will give me five minutes?” Vittoria whispered to her husband, and he nodded.

“Merthyr,” she said, passing him, “can I have your word that you will not go from me?”

Merthyr gave her his word after he had looked on her face.

“Send to me every two hours, that I may know you are near,” she added ; “do not fear waking me. Or, no, dear friend ; why should I have any concealment from you ? Be not a moment absent, if you would not have me fall to the ground a second time : follow me.”

Even as he hesitated, for he had urgent stuff to communicate to Carlo, he could see a dreadful whiteness rising on her face, darkening the circles of her eyes.

“It’s life or death, my dearest, and I am bound to live,” she said. Her voice sprang up from tears.

Merthyr turned and tried in vain to get a hearing among the excited, voluble men. They shook his hand, patted his shoulder, and counselled him to leave them. He obtained Carlo’s promise that he would not quit the house without granting him an interview ; after which he passed out to Vittoria, where Countess Ammiani and Laura sat weeping by the door.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE WIFE AND THE HUSBAND.

WHEN they were alone Merthyr said: "I cannot give many minutes, not much time. I have to speak to your husband."

She answered: "Give me many minutes—much time. All other speaking is vain here."

"It concerns his safety."

"It will not save him."

"But I have evidence that he is betrayed. His plans are known; a trap is set for him. If he moves, he walks into a pit."

"You would talk reason, Merthyr," Vittoria sighed. "Talk it to me. I can listen; I thirst for it. I beat at the bars of a cage all day. When I saw you this afternoon, I looked on another life. It was too sudden, and I swooned. That was my only show of weakness. Since then you are the only strength I feel."

"Have they all become Barto Rizzos?" Merthyr exclaimed.

"Beloved, I will open my mind to you," said Vittoria. "I am cowardly, and I thought I had such courage! To-night a poor mad creature has been here, who has oppressed me, I cannot say how long, with real fear that I only understand now that I know the little ground I had for it. I could have had nothing but actual fear of him, so I must be able to deceive myself terribly, and what I am I no longer comprehend. I am even pleased that one like Barto Rizzo should see me in a better light. I find the thought smiling in my heart when every other thing is utterly dark there. You have heard that Carlo goes to Brescia. When I was married, I lost sight of Italy, and everything but happiness. I suffer as I deserve for it now. I could have turned my husband from this black path; I preferred to dream and sing. I would not see—it was my pride that would not let me see his error. My cowardice would not let me wound him with a single suggestion. You say that he is betrayed. Then he is betrayed by the woman who has never been unintelligible to me. We were in Turin surrounded by intrigues, and there I thanked her so much for leaving me the days with my husband by Lake Orta that I did not seek to open his

eyes to her. We came to Milan, and here I have been thanking her for the happy days in Turin. Carlo is no longer to blame if he will not listen to me. I have helped to teach him that I am no better than any of these Italian women whom he despises. I spoke to him as his wife should do, at last. He feigned to think me jealous, and I too remember the words of the reproach, as if they had a meaning. Ah, my friend! I would say of nothing that it is impossible except this task of recovering lost ground with one who is young. Experience of trouble has made me older than he. When he accused me of jealousy, I could mention Countess d'Isorella's name no more. I confess to that. Yet I knew my husband feigned. I knew that he could not conceive the idea of jealousy existing in me, as little as I could imagine unfaithfulness in him. But my lips would not take her name! Wretched cowardice cannot go farther. I spoke of Rome. As often as I spoke, that name was enough to shake me off: he had but to utter it, and I became dumb. He did it to obtain peace; for no other cause. So, by degrees, I have learnt the fatal truth. He has trusted her, for she is very skilful; distrusting her, for she is treacherous. He has, therefore, believed excessively in his ability to make use of her, and to counteract her baseness.

I saw his error from the first ; and I went on dreaming and singing ; and now this night has come ! ”

Vittoria shadowed her eyes.

“ I will go to him at once,” said Merthyr.

“ Yes ; I am relieved. Go, dear friend,” she sobbed ; “ you have given me tears, as I hoped. You will not turn him ; had it been possible, could I have kept you from him so long ? I know that you will not turn him from his purpose, for I know what a weight it is that presses him forward in that path. Do not imagine our love to be broken. He will convince you that it is not. He has the nature of an angel. He permitted me to speak before these men to-night—feeble thing that I am ! It was a last effort. I might as well have tried to push a rock.”

She rose at a noise of voices in the hall below.

“ They are going, Merthyr. See him now. There may be help in heaven ; if one could think it ! If help were given to this country—if help were only visible ! The want of it makes us all without faith.”

“ Hush ! you may hear good news from Carlo Alberto in a few hours,” said Merthyr.

“ Ask Laura ; she has witnessed how he can be shattered,” Vittoria replied bitterly.

Merthyr pressed her fingers. He was met by Carlo on the stairs.

"Quick!" Carlo said; "I have scarce a minute to spare. I have my adieux to make, and the tears have set in already. First, a request: you will promise to remain beside my wife; she will want more than her own strength."

Such a request, coming from an Italian husband, was so great a proof of the noble character of his love and his knowledge of the woman he loved, that Merthyr took him in his arms and kissed him.

"Get it over quickly, dear good fellow," Carlo murmured; "you have something to tell me. Whatever it is, it's air; but I'll listen."

They passed into a vacant room.

"You know you are betrayed," Merthyr began.

"Not exactly that," said Carlo, humming carelessly.

"Positively and absolutely. The Countess d'Isorella has sold your secrets."

"I commend her to the profit she has made by it."

"Do you play with your life?"

Carlo was about to answer in the tone he had assumed for the interview. He checked the laugh on his lips.

"She must have some regard for my life, such as it's worth, since, to tell you the truth, she is in the house now, and came here to give me fair warning."

"Then, you trust her."

"I? Not a single woman in the world!—that is, for a conspiracy."

It was an utterly fatuous piece of speech. Merthyr allowed it to slip, and studied him to see where he was vulnerable.

"She is in the house, you say. Will you cause her to come before me?"

"Curiously," said Carlo, "I kept her for some purpose of the sort. Will I? and have a scandal now? Oh! no. Let her sleep."

Whether he spoke from noble-mindedness or indifference, Merthyr could not guess.

"I have a message from your friend Luciano. He sends you his love, in case he should be shot the first, and says that when Lombardy is free he hopes you will not forget old comrades who are in Rome."

"Forget him! I would to God I could sit and talk of him for hours. Luciano! Luciano! He has no wife."

Carlo spoke on hoarsely. "Tell me what authority you have for charging Countess d'Isorella with . . . with whatever it may be."

“A conversation between Countess Anna of Lenkenstein and a Major Nagen, in the Duchess of Graätli’s house, was overheard by our Beppo. They spoke German. The rascal had a German sweetheart with him. She imprisoned him for some trespass, and had come stealing in to rescue him, when those two entered the room. Countess Anna detailed to Nagen the course of your recent plotting. She named the hour this morning when you are to start for Brescia. She stated what force you have, what arms you expect; she named you all.”

“Nagen—Nagen,” Carlo repeated; “the man’s unknown to me.”

“It’s sufficient that he is an Austrian officer.”

“Quite. She hates me, and she has reason, for she’s aware that I mean to fight her lover, and choose my time. The blood of my friends is on that man’s head.”

“I will finish what I have to say,” pursued Merthyr. “When Beppo had related as much as he could make out from his sweetheart’s translation, I went straight to the duchess. She is an Austrian, and a good and reasonable woman. She informed me that a letter addressed by Countess Anna to Countess d’Isorella fell into her hands this night. She burnt it unopened. I leave it to you to consider

whether you have been betrayed and who has betrayed you. The secret was bought. Beppo himself caught the words, 'from a mercenary Italian.' The duchess tells me that Countess Anna is in the habit of alluding to Countess d'Isorella in those terms."

Carlo stretched his arms like a man who cannot hide the yawning fit.

"I promised my wife five minutes, though we have had the worst of the parting over. Perhaps you will wait for me; I may have a word to say."

He was absent for little more than the space named. When he returned, he was careful to hide his face. He locked the door, and leading Merthyr to an inner room, laid his watch on the table, and said: "Now, friend, you will see that I have nothing to shrink from, for I am going to do execution upon myself, and before him whom I would, above all other men, have think well of me. My wife supposes that I am pledged to this Brescian business because I am insanely patriotic. If I might join Luciano to-morrow I would shout like a boy. I would be content to serve as the lowest in the ranks, if I might be with you all under the Chief. Rome crowns him, and Brescia is my bloody ditch, and it is deserved! When I was a little younger—I am a

boy still, no doubt—I had the honour to be distinguished by a handsome woman; and when I grew a little older, I discovered by chance that she had wit. The lady is the Countess Violetta d'Isorella. It is a grief to me to know that she is sordid: it hurts my vanity the more. Perhaps you begin to perceive that vanity governs me. The Signora Laura has not expressed her opinion on this subject with any reserve, but to Violetta belongs the merit of having seen it without waiting for the signs. First—it is a small matter, but you are English—let me assure you that my wife has had no rival. I have taunted her with jealousy when I knew that it was neither in her nature to feel it, nor in mine to give reason for it. No man who has a spark of his Maker in him could be unfaithful to such a woman. When Lombardy was crushed, we were in the dust. I fancy we none of us knew how miserably we had fallen—we, as men. The purest—I daresay, the bravest—marched to Rome. God bless my Luciano there! But I, sir, I, my friend, I, Merthyr, I said proudly that I would not abandon a beaten country; and I was admired for my devotion. The dear old poet, Agostino, praised me. It stopped his epigrams—during a certain time at least. Colonel Corte admired me. Marco Sana, Giulio Bandinelli admired

me. Vast numbers admired me. I need not add that I admired myself. I plunged into intrigues with princes, and priests, and republicans. A clever woman was at my elbow. In the midst of all this, my marriage: I had seven weeks of peace; and then I saw what I was. You feel that you are tied, when you want to go another way: and you feel that you have been mad when you want to undo your work. But I could not break the chains I had wrought, for I was a chief of followers. The men had come from exile, or they had refused to join the Roman enterprise:—they, in fact, had bound themselves to me; and that means, I was irrevocably bound to them. I had an insult to wipe out: I refrained from doing it, sincerely, I may tell you, on the ground that this admired life of mine was precious. I will heap no more clumsy irony on it: I can pity it. Do you see now how I stand? I know that I cannot rely on the king's luck or on the skill of his generals, or on the power of his army, or on the spirit in Lombardy: neither on men nor on angels. But I cannot draw back. I have set going a machine that's merciless. From the day it began working, every moment has added to its force. Do not judge me by your English eyes:—other lands, other habits; other habits, other thoughts. And

besides, if honour said nothing, simple humanity would preserve me from leaving my band to perish like a flock of sheep."

He uttered this with a profound conviction of his quality as leader that escaped the lurid play of self-inspection which characterized what he had previously spoken, and served singularly in bearing witness to the truth of his charge against himself.

"Useless!" he said, waving his hand at anticipated remonstrances. "Look with the eyes of my country; not with your own, my friend. I am disgraced if I do not go out. My friends are disgraced if I do not head them in Brescia—sacrificed!—murdered!—how can I say what? Can I live under disgrace or remorse? The king stakes on his army; I on the king. Whether he fights and wins, or fights and loses, I go out. I have promised my men—promised them success, I believe!—God forgive me! Did you ever see a fated man before? None have plotted against me. I have woven my own web, and that's the fatal thing. I have a wife, the sweetest woman of her time. Good night to her! our parting is over."

He glanced at his watch. "Perhaps she will be at the door below. Her heart beats like mine just now. You wish to say that you think me betrayed, and

therefore I may draw back? Did you not hear that Bergamo has risen? The Brescians are up too by this time. Gallant Brescians! they never belie the proverb in their honour; and to die among them would be sweet if I had all my manhood about me. Shall I call down Violetta d'Isorella?"

"Yes; see her; set the woman face to face with me!" cried Merthyr, sighting a gleam of hope.

"And have the poor wretch on her knees, and the house buzzing?" Carlo smiled. "Can she bear my burden though she be ten times guilty? Let her sleep. The Brescians are up:—that's an hour that has struck, and there's no calling it to move a step in the rear. Brescia under the big eastern hill which throws a cloak on it at sunrise! Brescia is always the eagle that looks over Lombardy! And Bergamo! you know the terraces of Bergamo. Aren't they like a morning sky? Dying there is not death; it's flying into the dawn. You Romans envy us. Come, confess it; you envy us. You have no Alps, no crimson hills, nothing but old walls to look on while you fight. Farewell, Merthyr Powys. I hear my servant's foot outside. My horse is awaiting me saddled, a mile from the city. Perhaps I shall see my wife again at the door below, or in heaven.

Addio! Kiss Luciano for me. Tell him that I knew myself as well as he did, before the end came. Enrico, Emilio, and the others—tell them I love them. I doubt if there will ever be but a ghost of me to fight beside them in Rome. And there's no honour, Merthyr, in a ghost's fighting, because he's shot-proof; so I won't say what the valiant disembodied *I* may do by-and-by."

He held his hands out, with the light soft smile of one who asks forgiveness for flippant speech, and concluded firmly: "I have talked enough, and you are the man of sense I thought you; for to give me advice is childish when no power on earth could make me follow it. Addio! Kiss me."

They embraced. Merthyr said no more than that he would place messengers on the road to Brescia to carry news of the king's army. His voice was thick, and when Carlo laughed at him, his sensations strangely reversed their situations.

There were two cloaked figures at different points in the descent of the stairs. These rose severally at Carlo's approach, took him to their bosoms, and kissed him in silence. They were his mother and Laura. A third crouched by the door of the courtyard, which was his wife.

Merthyr kept aloof until the heavy door rolled a long dull sound. Vittoria's head was shawled over. She stood where her husband had left her, groping for him with one hand, that closed tremblingly hard on Merthyr when he touched it. Not a word was spoken in the house.

CHAPTER XLV.

SHOWS MANY PATHS CONVERGING TO THE END.

UNTIL daylight Merthyr sat by himself, trying to realise the progressive steps of the destiny which seemed like a visible hand upon Count Ammiani, that he might know it to be nothing else than Carlo's work. He sat in darkness in the room where Carlo had spoken, thinking of him as living and dead. The brilliant life in Carlo protested against a possible fatal tendency in his acts so irrevocable as to plunge him to destruction when his head was clear, his blood cool, and a choice lay open to him. That brilliant young life, that fine face, the tones of Carlo's voice, swept about Merthyr, accusing him of stupid fatalism. Grief stopped his answer to the charge; but in his wise mind he knew Carlo to have surveyed things justly; and that the Fates are within us. Those

which are the forces of the outer world are as shadows to the power we have created within us. He felt this because it was his gathered wisdom. Human compassion, and love for the unhappy youth, crushed it in his heart, and he marvelled how he could have been paralysed when he had a chance of interceding. Can a man stay a torrent? But a noble and fair young life in peril will not allow our philosophy to liken it to things of nature. The downward course of a fall that takes many waters till it rushes irresistibly is not the course of any life. Yet it is true that our destiny is of our own weaving. Carlo's involvements cast him into extreme peril, almost certain death, unless he abjured his honour, dearer than a life made precious by love. Merthyr saw that it was not vanity, but honour; for Carlo stood pledged to lead a forlorn enterprise, the ripeness of his own scheming. In the imminent hour Carlo had recognised his position as Merthyr with the wisdom of years looked on it. That was what had paralyzed the older man, though he could not subsequently trace the cause. Thinking of the beauty of the youth, husband of the woman who was to his soul utterly an angel, Merthyr sat in the anguish of self-accusation, believing that some remonstrance, some inspired word, might have turned him, and half

dreading to sound his own heart, as if an evil knowledge of his nature haunted it.

He rose up at last with a cry. The door opened, and Giacinta, Vittoria's maid, appeared, bearing a lamp. She had been sitting outside, waiting to hear him stir before she intruded. He touched her cheek kindly, and thought that one could do little better than die, if need were, in the service of such a people. She said that her mistress was kneeling. She wished to make coffee for him, and Merthyr let her do it, knowing the comfort there is to a woman in the ministering occupation of her hands. It was soon daylight. Beppo had not come back to the house.

"No one has left the house?" Merthyr asked.

"Not since——" she answered convulsively.

"The Countess d'Isorella is here?"

"Yes, signore."

"Asleep?" he put the question mournfully, in remembrance of Carlo's "Let her sleep!"

"Yes, signore; like the first night after confession."

"She resides, I think, in the Corso Venezia. When she awakens, let her know that I request to have the honour of conducting her."

"Yes, signore. Her carriage is still at the

gates. The countess's horses are accustomed to stand."

Merthyr knew this for an insinuation against his leaving, as well as against the lady's character.

"Let your mistress be assured that I shall on no account be long absent at any time."

"Signore, I shall do so," said Giacinta.

She brought him word soon after, that Countess d'Isorella was stirring. Merthyr met Violetta on the stairs.

"Can it be true?" she accosted him first.

"Count Ammiani has left for Brescia," he replied.

"In spite of my warning?"

Merthyr gave space for her to pass into the room. She appeared undecided, saying that she had a dismal apprehension of her not having dismissed her coachman overnight.

"In spite of my warning," she murmured again, "he has really gone? Surely I cannot have slept more than three hours."

"It was Count Ammiani's wish that you should enjoy your full sleep undisturbed in his house," said Merthyr. "As regards your warning to him, he has left Milan perfectly convinced of the gravity of a warning that comes from you."

Violetta shrugged lightly. "Then all we have to do is to pray for the success of Carlo Alberto."

"Oh! pardon me, countess," Merthyr rejoined, "prayers may be useful, but you at least have something to do besides."

His eyes caught hers firmly as they were letting a wild look of interrogation fall on him, and he continued with perfect courtesy, "You will accompany me to see Countess Anna of Lenkenstein. You have great influence, madame. It is not Count Ammiani's request; for, as I informed you, it was his wish that you should enjoy your repose. The request is mine, because his life is dear to me. Nagen, I think, is the name of the Austrian officer who has started for Brescia."

She had in self-defence to express surprise while he spoke, which compelled her to meet his mastering sight and submit to a struggle of vision sufficient to show him that he had hit a sort of guilty consciousness. Otherwise she was not discomposed, and with marvellous sagacity she accepted the forbearance he assumed, not affecting innocence to challenge it, as silly criminals always do when they are exposed, but answering quite in the tone of innocence, and so throwing the burden by an appearance of mutual consent on some unnamed third person.

“Certainly ; let us go to Countess Anna of Lenkenstein, if you think fit. I have to rely on your judgment. I quite abjure my own. If I have to plead for anything, I am going before a woman, remember.”

“I do not forget it,” said Merthyr.

“The expedition to Brescia may be unfortunate,” she resumed hurriedly ; “I wish it had not been undertaken. At any rate, it rescues Count Ammiani from an expedition to Rome, and his slavish devotion to that priest-hating man whom he calls, or called, his chief. At Brescia he is not outraging the head of our religion. That is a gain.”

“A gain for him in the next world ?” said Merthyr. “I believe that Countess Anna of Lenkenstein is also a fervent Catholic ; is she not ?”

“I trust so.”

“On behalf of her peace of mind, I trust so, too. In that case, she also must be a sound sleeper.”

“We shall have to awaken her. What excuse—what am I to say to her ?”

“I beg you to wait for the occasion, Countess d’Isorella. The words will come.”

Violetta bit her lip. She had consented to this

extraordinary step in an amazement. As she contemplated it now, it seemed worse than a partial confession and an appeal to his generosity. She broke out in pity for her horses; in dread of her coachman, declaring that it was impossible for her to give him the order to drive her anywhere but home.

“With your permission, countess, I will undertake to give him the order,” said Merthyr.

“But have you no compassion, Signor Powys? and you are an Englishman! I thought that Englishmen were excessively compassionate towards horses.”

“They have been known to kill them in the service of their friends, nevertheless.”

“Well!”—Violetta had recourse to the expression of her shoulders—“and I am really to see Countess Anna?”

“In my presence.”

“Oh! that cannot be. Pardon me; it is impossible. She will decline the scene. I say it with the utmost sincerity: I know that she will refuse.”

“Then, countess,” Merthyr’s face grew hard, “if I am not to be in your company to prompt you, allow me to instruct you beforehand.”

Violetta looked at him eagerly, as one looks for

tidings, with an involuntary beseeching quiver of the strained eyelids.

“No irony!” she said, fearing horribly that he was about to throw off the mask of irony.

This desperate effort of her wits at the crisis succeeded.

Merthyr, not knowing what design he had, hopeless of any definite end in tormenting the woman, and never having it in his mind merely to punish, was diverted by the exclamation to speak ironically. “You can tell Countess Anna that it is only her temporal sovereign who is attacked, and that therefore——” he could not continue.

“Some affection?” he murmured, in intense grief.

His manly forbearance touched her whose moral wit was too blunt to apprehend the contempt in it.

“Much affection—much!” Violetta exclaimed. “I have a deep affection for Count Ammiani; an old friendship. Believe me! believe me! I came here last night to save him. Anything on earth that I can do, I will do—on my honour; and do not smile at that—I have never pledged it without fulfilling the oath. I will not sleep while I can aid in preserving him. He shall know that I am not the base person he has conceived me to be. You, Signor

Powys, are not a man to paint all women black that are a little less than celestial—are you? I am told it is a trick with your countrymen; and they have a poet who knew us! I entreat you to confide in me. I am at present quite unaware that Count Ammiani runs particular—I mean personal—danger. He is in danger, of course; every one can see it. But, on my honour—and never in my life have I spoken so earnestly, my friends would hardly recognise me—I declare to you on my faith as a Christian lady, I am ignorant of any plot against him. I can take a Cross and kiss it, like a peasant, and swear to you by the Madonna that I know nothing of it.”

She corrected her ardour, half-exulting in finding herself carried so far and so swimmingly on a tide of truth, half wondering whether the flowering beauty of her face in excitement had struck his sensibility. He was cold and speculative.

“Ah!” she said, “if I were to ask my compatriots to put faith in a woman’s pure friendship for a man, I should know the answer; but you, Signor Powys, who have shown us that a man is capable of the purest friendship for a woman, should believe me.”

He led her down to the gates, where her coachman sat muffled in a three-quarter sleep. The word was

given to drive to her own house; rejoiced by which she called his attention deplorably to the condition of her horses, requesting him to say whether he could imagine them the best English, and confessing, with regret, that she killed three sets a year—loved them well, notwithstanding. Merthyr saw enough of her to feel that she was one of the weak creatures who are strong through our greater weakness; and, either by intuition or quick wit, too lively and too subtle to be caught by simple suspicion. She even divined that reflection might tell him she had evaded him by an artifice—a piece of gross cajolery; and said, laughing: “Concerning friendship, I could offer it to a boy, like Carlo Ammiani; not to you, Signor Powys. I know that I must check a youth, and I am on my guard. I should be eternally tormented to discover whether your armour was proof.”

“I dare say that a lady who had those torments would soon be able to make them mine,” said Merthyr.

“You could not pay a fairer compliment to some one else,” she remarked. In truth, the candid personal avowal seemed to her to hold up Vittoria’s sacred honour in a crystal, and the more she thought of it, the more she respected him, for his shrewd intelligence, if not for his sincerity; but on the

whole she fancied him a loyal friend, not solely a clever maker of phrases ; and she was pleased with herself for thinking such a matter possible, in spite of her education.

“ I do most solemnly hope that you may not have to sustain Countess Alessandra under any affliction whatsoever,” she said at parting.

Violetta had escaped an exposure—a rank and naked accusation of her character and deeds. She feared nothing but that, being quite indifferent to opinion ; a woman who would not have thought it preternaturally sad to have to walk as a penitent in the streets, with the provision of a very thick veil to cover her. She had escaped, but the moment she felt herself free, she was surprised by a sharp twinge of remorse. She summoned her maid to undress her, and smelt her favourite perfume, and lay in her bed, to complete her period of rest, closing her eyes there with a child’s faith in pillows. Flying lights and blood-blotches rushed within a span of her forehead. She met this symptom promptly with a medical receipt ; yet she had no sleep ; nor would coffee give her sleep. She shrank from opium as deleterious to the constitution, and her mind settled on music as the remedy. Some time after her craving for it had commenced, an Austrian foot regiment, marching to

the drum, passed under her windows. The fife is a merry instrument; fife and drum colour the images of battle gaily; but the dull ringing Austrian step-drum, beating unaccompanied, strikes the mind with the real nature of battles, as the salt smell of powder strikes it, and more in horror, more as a child's imagination realises bloodshed, where the scene is a rolling heaven, black and red on all sides, with pitiable men moving up to the mouth of butchery, the insufferable flashes, the dark illumination of red, red of black, like a vision of the shadows Life and Death in a shadow-fight over the dear man still living. Sensitive minds may be excited by a small stimulant to see such pictures. This regimental drum is like a song of the flat-headed savage in man. It has no rise or fall, but leads to the bloody business with an unvarying note, and a savage's dance in the middle of the rhythm. Violetta listened to it until her heart quickened with alarm lest she should be going to have a fever. She thought of Carlo Ammiani, and of the name of Nagen; she had seen him at the Lenkensteins. Her instant supposition was that Anna had perhaps paid heavily for the secret of Carlo's movements on purpose to place Major Nagen on the Brescian highroad to capture him. Capture meant a long

imprisonment, if not execution. Partly for the sake of getting peace of mind—for she was shocked by her temporary inability to command repose—but with some hope of convincing Carlo that she strove to be of use to him, she sent for the spy Luigi, and at a cost of two hundred and twenty Austrian florins, obtained his promise upon oath to follow Count Ammiani into Brescia, if necessary, and deliver to him a letter she had written, wherein Nagen's name was mentioned, and Carlo was advised to avoid personal risks; the letter hinted that he might have incurred a private enmity, and he had better keep among his friends. She knew the writing of this letter to be the foolishhest thing she had ever done. Two hundred and twenty florins—the man originally stipulated to have three hundred—was a large sum to pay for postage. However, sacrifices must now and then be made for friendship and for sleep. When she had paid half the money, her mind was relieved, and she had the rest which preserves beauty. Luigi was to be paid the other half on his return. “He may never return,” she thought, while graciously dismissing him. The deduction by mental arithmetic of the two hundred and twenty, or the one hundred and ten florins, from the large amount Countess Anna was bound to pay her in turn,

annoyed her, though she knew it was a trifle. For this lady, Milan, Turin, and Paris sighed deeply.

When he had left Violetta at her house in the Corso, Merthyr walked briskly for exercise, knowing that he would have need of his health and strength. He wanted a sight of Alps to wash out the image of the woman from his mind, and passed the old Marshal's habitation fronting the gardens, wishing that he stood in the field against the fine old warrior, for whom he had a liking. Near the walls he discovered Beppo sitting pensively with his head between his two fists. Beppo had not seen Count Ammiani, but he had seen Barto Rizzo, and pointing to the walls, said that Barto had dropped down there. He had met him hurrying in the Corso Francesco. Barto took him to the house of Sarpo, the bookseller, who possessed a small printing press. Beppo described vividly, with his usual vivacity of illustration, the stupefaction of the man at the apparition of his tormentor, whom he thought fast in prison; and how Barto had compelled him to print a proclamation to the Piedmontese, Lombards, and Venetians, setting forth that a battle had been fought south of the Ticino, and that Carlo Alberto was advancing on Milan, signed with the name of the Piedmontese Pole in command of the King's army. A second, framed

as an order of the day, spoke of victory and the planting of the green white and red banner on the Adige, and forward to the Isonzo.

"I can hear nothing of Carlo Alberto's victory," Beppo said; "no one has heard of it. Barto told us how the battle was fought, and the name of the young lieutenant who discovered the enemy's flank march, and got the artillery down on him, and pounded him so that—signore, it's amazing! I'm ready to cry, and laugh, and howl!—fifteen thousand men capitulated in a heap!"

"Don't you know you've been listening to a mad-man?" said Merthyr, irritated, and thoroughly angered to see Beppo's opposition to that view.

"Signore, Barto described the whole battle. It began at five o'clock in the morning."

"When it was dark!"

"Yes; *when* it was dark. He said so. And we sent up rockets, and caught the enemy coming on, and the cavalry of Alessandria fell upon two batteries of field guns and carried them off, and Colonel Romboni was shot in his back, and cries he, 'Best give up the ghost if you're hit in the rear. Evviva l'Italia!'"

"A Piedmontese colonel, you fool! he would have shouted 'Viva Carlo Alberto!'" said Merthyr, now

critically disgusted with the tale, and refusing to hear more. Two hours later, he dispatched Beppo to Carlo in Brescia, warning him that for some insane purpose these two proclamations had been printed by Barto Rizzo, and that they were false.

It was early on the morning of a second day, before sunrise, when Vittoria sent for Merthyr to conduct her to the cathedral. "There has been a battle," she said. Her lips hardly joined to frame the syllables in speech. Merthyr refrained from asking where she had heard of the battle. As soon as the Duomo doors were open, he led her in and left her standing shrinking under the great vault with her neck fearfully drawn on her shoulders, as one sees birds under thunder. He thought that she was losing courage. Choosing to go out on the steps rather than look on her, he was struck by the sight of two horsemen, who proved to be Austrian officers, rattling at racing speed past the Duomo up the Corso. The sight of them made it seem possible that a battle had been fought. As soon as he was free, Merthyr went to the Duchess of Graätli, from whom he had the news of Novara. The officers he had seen were Prince Radocky and Lieutenant Wilfrid Pierson, the old marshal's emissaries of victory. They had made a bet on the bloody field

about reaching Milan first, and the duchess affected to be full of the humour of this bet in order to conceal her exultation. The Lenkensteins called on her; the Countess of Lenkenstein, Anna, and Lena; and they were less considerate, and drew their joy openly from the source of his misery—a dreadful house for Merthyr to remain in, but he hoped to see Wilfrid, having heard the duchess rally Lena concerning the deeds of the white umbrella, which, Lena said, was pierced with balls, and had been preserved for her. “The dear foolish fellow insisted on marching right into the midst of the enemy with his absurd white umbrella; and wherever there was danger the men were seen following it. Prince Radocky told me the whole army was laughing. How he escaped death was a miracle!” She spoke unaffectedly of her admiration for the owner, and as Wilfrid came in she gave him brilliant eyes. He shook Merthyr’s hand without looking at him. The ladies would talk of nothing but the battle, so he went up to Merthyr, and, under pretext of an eager desire for English news, drew him away.

“Her husband was not there? not at Novara, I mean?” he said.

“He’s at Brescia,” said Merthyr.

“Well, thank goodness he didn’t stand in

those ranks!" Wilfrid murmured, puffing thoughtfully over the picture they presented to his memory.

Merthyr then tried to hint to him that he had a sort of dull suspicion of Carlo's being in personal danger, but of what kind he could not say. He mentioned Weisspriess by name; and Nagen; and Countess Anna. Wilfrid said, "I'll find out if there's anything, only don't be fancying it. The man's in a bad hole at Brescia. Weisspriess, I believe, is at Verona. He's an honourable fellow. The utmost he would do would be to demand a duel; and I'm sure he's heartily sick of that work. Besides, he and Countess Anna have quarrelled. Meet me;—by the way, you and I musn't be seen meeting, I suppose. The duchess is neutral ground. Come here to-night. And don't talk of me, but say that a friend asks how she is, and hopes—the best things you can say for me. I must go up to their confounded chatter again. Tell her there's no fear, none whatever. You all hate us, naturally; but you know that Austrian officers are gentlemen. Don't speak my name to her just yet. Unless, of course, she should happen to allude to me, which is unlikely. I had a dismal idea that her husband was at Novara."

The tender-hearted duchess sent a message to

Vittoria, bidding her not to forget that she had promised her at Meran to 'love her always.'

"And tell her," she said to Merthyr, "that I do not think I shall have my rooms open for the concert to-morrow night. I prefer to let Antonio-Pericles go mad. She will not surely consider that she is bound by her promise to him? He drags poor Irma from place to place to make sure the miserable child is not plotting to destroy his concert, as that man Sarpo did. Irma is half dead, and hasn't the courage to offend him. She declares she depends upon him for her English reputation. She has already caught a violent cold, and her sneezing is frightful. I have never seen so abject a creature. I have no compassion at the sight of her."

That night Merthyr heard from Wilfrid that a plot against Carlo Ammiani did exist. He repeated what he had heard pass between Countess d'Isorella and Irma in the chamber of Pericles before the late battle. Modestly confessing that he was 'for some reasons' in high favour with Countess Lena, he added that after a long struggle he had brought her to confess that her sister had sworn to have Countess Alessandra Ammiani begging at her feet.

By mutual consent they went to consult the duchess. She repelled the notion of Austrian women

conspiring. "An Austrian noble lady—do you think it possible that she would act secretly to serve a private hatred? Surely I may ask you, for my sake, to think better of us?"

Merthyr showed her an opening to his ground by suggesting that Anna's antipathy to Vittoria might spring more from a patriotic than a private source.

"Oh! I will certainly make inquiries, if only to save Anna's reputation with her enemies," the duchess answered rather proudly.

It would have been a Novara to Pericles if Vittoria had refused to sing. He held the pecuniarily-embarrassed duchess sufficiently in his power to command a concert at her house; his argument to those who pressed him to spare Vittoria in a season of grief running seriously, with visible contempt of their intellects, thus: "A great voice is an ocean. You cannot drain it with forty dozen opera-hats. It is something found—an addition to the wealth of this life. Shall we not enjoy what we find? You do not wear out a picture by looking at it; likewise you do not wear out a voice by listening to it. A bird has wings;—here is a voice. Why were they given? I should say to go into the air. Ah! but not if grandmother is ill. What is a grandmother to the wings and the voice? If to sing would kill,—yes, then let the puny

thing be silent ! But Sandra Belloni has a soul that has not a husband—except her art. Her body is husbanded ; but her soul is above her body. You would treat it as below. Art is her soul's husband ! Besides, I have her promise. She is a girl who will go up to a loaded gun's muzzle if she gives her word. And besides, her husband may be shot to-morrow. So, all she sings now is clear gain."

Vittoria sent word to him that she would sing.

In the meantime a change had come upon Countess Anna. Weisspriess, her hero, appeared at her brother's house, fresh from the field of Novara, whither he had hurried from Verona on a bare pretext that was a breach of military discipline requiring friendly interposition in high quarters. Unable to obtain an audience with Count Lenkenstein, he remained in the hall, hoping for things which he affected to care nothing for ; and so it chanced that he saw Lena, who was mindful that her sister had suffered much from passive jealousy when Wilfrid returned from the glorious field, and led him to Anna, that she also might rejoice in a hero. Weisspriess did not refrain from declaring on the way that he would rather charge against a battery. Some time after Anna lay in Lena's arms, sobbing out one of the wildest confessions ever made by woman :—she adored Weiss-

priess ; she hated Nagen ; but was miserably bound to the man she hated. “ Oh ! now I know what love is.” She repeated this with transparent enjoyment of the opposing sensations by whose shock the knowledge was revealed to her.

“ How can you be bound to Major Nagen ? ” asked Lena.

“ Oh ! why ? except that I have been possessed by devils,” Anna moaned. “ Living among these Italians has distempered my blood.” She exclaimed that she was lost.

“ In what way can you be lost ? ” said Lena.

“ I have squandered more than half that I possess. I am almost a beggar. I am no longer the wealthy Countess Anna. I am much poorer than any one of us.”

“ But Major Weisspriess is a man of honour, and if he loves you——”

“ Yes ; he loves me ! he loves me ! or would he come to me after I have sent him against a dozen swords ? But he is poor ; he must, must marry a wealthy woman. I used to hate him because I thought he had his eye on money. I love him for it now. He deserves wealth ; he is a matchless hero. He is more than the first swordsman of our army ; he is a knightly man. Oh my soul Johann ! ” She

very soon fell to raving. Lena was implored by her to give her hand to Weisspriess in reward for his heroism—"For you are rich," Anna said; "you will not have to go to him feeling that you have made him face death a dozen times for your sake, and that you thank him and reward him by being a whimpering beggar in his arms. Do, dearest! Will you? Will you, to please me, marry Johann? He is not unworthy of you." And more of this hysterical hypocrisy, which brought on fits of weeping. "I have lived among these savages till I have ceased to be human—forgotten everything but my religion," she said. "I wanted Weisspriess to show them that they dared not stand up against a man of us, and to tame the snarling curs. He did. He is brave. He did as much as a man could do, but I was unappeasable. They seem to have bitten me till I had a devouring hunger to humiliate them. Lena, will you believe that I have no hate for Carlo Ammiani or the woman he has married? None! and yet, what have I done!' Anna smote her forehead. "They are nothing but little dots on a field for me. I don't care whether they live or die. It's like a thing done in sleep."

"I want to know what you have done," said Lena, caressingly.

"You at least will try to reward our truest hero,

and make up to him for your sister's unkindness, will you not?" Anna replied with a cajolery wonderfully like a sincere expression of her wishes. "He will be a good husband. He has proved it by having been so faithful a—lover. So you may be sure of him. And when he is yours, do not let him fight again, Lena, for I have a sickening presentiment that his next duel is his last."

"Tell me," Lena entreated her, "pray tell me what horrible thing you have done to prevent your marrying him."

"With their pride and their laughter," Anna made answer; "the fools! were they to sting us perpetually and not suffer for it? That woman, the Countess Alessandra, as she's now called—have you forgotten that she helped our Paul's assassin to escape? was she not eternally plotting against Austria? And I say that I love Austria. I love my country; I plot for my country. She and her husband plot, and I plot to thwart them. I have ruined myself in doing it. Oh, my heart! why has it commenced beating again? Why did Weisspriess come here? He offended me. He refused to do my orders, and left me empty-handed, and if he suffers too," Anna relieved a hard look with a smile melancholy, "I hope he will not; I cannot say more."

“And I’m to console him if he does?” said Lena.

“At least, I shall be out of the way,” said Anna. “I have still money enough to make me welcome in a convent.”

“I am to marry him?” Lena persisted, and half induced Anna to act a feeble part, composed of sobs and kisses and full confession of her plight. Anna broke from her in time to leave what she had stated of herself vague and self-justificatory, so that she kept her pride, and could forgive, as she was ready to do even so far as to ask forgiveness in turn, when with her awakened enamoured heart she heard Vittoria sing at the concert of Pericles. Countess Alessandra’s divine gift, which she would not withhold, though in a misery of apprehension; her grave eyes, which none could accuse of coldness, though they showed no emotion; her simple noble manner that seemed to lift her up among the forces threatening her; these expressions of a superior soul moved Anna under the influence of the incomparable voice to pass over envious contrasts, and feel that the voice and the nature were one in this bosom. Could it be the same as the accursed woman who had stood before her at Meran? She could hardly frame the question, but she had the thought suffi-

ciently firmly to save her dignity; she was affected by very strong emotion when Vittoria's singing ended, and nothing but the revival of the recollection of her old contempt preserved her from an impetuous desire to take the singer by the hand and have all clear between them; for they were now of equal rank to tolerating eyes. "But she has no religious warmth!" Anna reflected with a glow of satisfaction. The concert was broken up by Laura Piaveni. She said out loud that the presence of Major Weisspriess was intolerable to the Countess Alessandra. It happened that Weisspriess entered the room while Laura sat studying the effect produced by her countrywoman's voice on the thick eyelids of Austrian Anna, and Laura, seeing their enemy ready to weep in acknowledgment of their power, scorned the power which could never win freedom, and broke up the sitting, citing the offence of the presence of Weisspriess for a pretext. The incident threw Anna back upon her old vindictiveness. It caused an unpleasant commotion in the duchess's saloon. Count Serabiglione was present, and ran round to Weisspriess, apologising for his daughter's behaviour. "Do you think I can't deal with your women as well as your men, you ass?" said Weisspriess, enraged by the scandal of the

scene. He was overheard by Count Karl Lenkenstein, who took him to task sharply for his rough speech; but Anna supported her lover, and they joined hands publicly. Anna went home prostrated with despair. "What conscience is in me that I should wish one of my Kaiser's officers killed?" she cried enigmatically to Lena. "But I must have freedom. Oh! to be free. I am chained to my enemy, and God blesses that woman. He makes her weep, but he blesses her, for her body is free, and mine,—the thought of mine sets flames creeping up my limbs as if I were tied to the stake. Losing a husband you love—what is that to taking a husband you hate?" Still Lena could get no plain confession from her, for Anna clung to self-justification, and felt it abandoning her and her soul fluttering in a black gulf when she opened her mouth to disburden herself.

There came tidings of the bombardment of Brescia—one of the historic deeds of infamy. Many officers of the Imperial army perceived the shame which it cast upon their colours, even in those intemperate hours, and Karl Lenkenstein assumed the liberty of private friendship to go complaining to the old Marshal, who was too true a soldier to condemn a soldier in action, however strong his disapproval of

proceedings. The liberty assumed by Karl was excessive; he spoke out in the midst of General officers as if his views were shared by them and the Marshal; and his error was soon corrected; one after another reproached him, until the Marshal, pitying his condition, sent him into his writing-closet, where he lectured the youth on military discipline. It chanced that there followed between them a question upon what the general in command at Brescia would do with his prisoners; and hearing that they were subject to the rigours of a court-martial, and if adjudged guilty, would forthwith summarily be shot, Karl ventured to ask grace for Vittoria's husband. He succeeded finally in obtaining his kind old chief's promise that Count Ammiani should be tried in Milan, and as the bearer of a paper to that effect, he called on his sisters to get them or Wilfrid to convey word to Vittoria of her husband's probable safety. He found Anna in a swoon, and Lena and the duchess bending over her. The duchess's chasseur Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz had been returning from Meran, when on the Brescian highroad he met the spy Luigi, and acting promptly under the idea that Luigi was always a pestilential conductor of detestable correspondence, he attacked him, overthrew him, and ransacked him, and bore the fruit of

his sagacious exertions to his mistress in Milan ; it was Violetta d'Isorella's letter to Carlo Ammiani. "I have read it," the duchess said ; "contrary to my habits when letters are not addressed to me. I bring it open to your sister Anna. She catches sight of one or two names and falls down in the state in which you see her."

"Leave her to me," said Karl.

He succeeded in extracting from Anna hints of the fact that she had paid a large sum of her own money to Countess d'Isorella for secrets connected with the Bergamasc and Brescian rising. "We were under a mutual oath to be silent, but if one has broken it the other cannot ; so I confess it to you, dearest, good brother. I did this for my country at my personal sacrifice."

Karl believed that he had a sister magnificent in soul. She was glad to have deluded him, but she could not endure his praises, which painted to her imagination all that she might have been if she had not dashed her patriotism with the low cravings of vengeance, making herself like some abhorrent mediæval grotesque, composed of eagle and reptile. She was most eager in entreating him to save Count Ammiani's life. Carlo, she said, was their enemy, but he had been their friend, and she declared with

singular earnestness that she should never again sleep or hold up her head, if he were slain or captured.

"My Anna is justified by me in everything she has done," Karl said to the duchess.

"In that case," the duchess replied, "I have only to differ with her to feel your sword's point at my breast."

"I should certainly challenge the man who doubted her," said Karl.

The duchess laughed with a scornful melancholy.

On the steps of the door where his horse stood saddled, he met Wilfrid, and from this promised brother-in-law received matter for the challenge. Wilfrid excitedly accused Anna of the guilt of a conspiracy to cause the destruction of Count Ammiani. In the heat of his admiration for his sister, Karl struck him on the cheek with his glove, and called him a name by which he had passed during the days of his disgrace, signifying one who plays with two parties. Lena's maid heard them arrange to meet within an hour, and she having been a witness of the altercation, ran to her mistress in advance of Wilfrid, and so worked on Lena's terrors on behalf of her betrothed and her brother, that Lena dropped at Anna's feet, telling her all that she had gathered

and guessed in verification of Wilfrid's charge, and imploring her to confess the truth. Anna, though she saw her concealment pierced, could not voluntarily forego her brother's expressed admiration of her, and clung to the tatters of secrecy. After a brief, horrid hesitation, she chose to face Wilfrid. This interview began with lively recriminations, and was resulting in nothing—for Anna refused to be shaken by his statement that the Countess d'Isorella had betrayed her, and perceived that she was listening to concrete suspicions only—when, to give his accusation force, Wilfrid said that Brescia had surrendered and that Count Ammiani had escaped.

“And I thank God for it!” Anna exclaimed, and with straight frowning eyes, demanded the refutation of her sincerity.

“Count Ammiani and his men have five hours' grace ahead of Major Nagen and half a regiment,” said Wilfrid.

At this she gasped; she had risen her breath to deny or defy, and hung on the top of it without a voice.

“Tell us—say, do but say—confess that you know Nagen to be a name of mischief,” Lena prayed her.

"I will say anything to prevent my brother from running into danger," Anna rejoined.

"She is most foully accused by one whom we permitted to aspire to be of our own family," said Karl.

"Yet you, Karl, have always been the first to declare her revengeful," Lena turned to him.

"Help, Karl, help me," said Anna.

"Yes!" cried her sister; "there you stand, and ask for help, meanest of women! Do you think these men are not in earnest? Karl is to help you, and you will not speak a word to save him from a grave before night, or me from a lover all of blood."

"Am I to be the sacrifice?" said Anna.

"Whatever you call it, Wilfrid has spoken truth of you, and to none but members of our family; and he had a right to say it, and you are bound now to acknowledge it."

"I acknowledge that I love and serve my country, Lena."

"Not with a pure heart: you can't forgive. Insult or a wrong makes a madwoman of you. Confess, Anna! You know well that you can't kneel to a priest's ear, for you've stopped your conscience. You have pledged yourself to misery to satisfy a spite,

and you have not the courage to ask for——” Lena broke her speech like one whose wits have been kindled. “Yes, Karl,” she resumed; “Anna begged you to help her. You will. Take her aside and save her from being miserable for ever. You do mean to fight my Wilfrid?”

“I am certainly determined to bring him to repentance—leaving him the option of the way,” said Karl.

Lena took her sullen sister by the arm.

“Anna, will you let these two men go to slaughter? Look at them; they are both our brothers. One is dearer than a brother to me, and, oh God! I have known what it is to half-lose him. You to lose a lover and have to go bound by a wretched oath to be the wife of a detestable short-sighted husband! Oh, what an abominable folly!”

This epithet, ‘short-sighted,’ curiously forced in by Lena, was like a shock of the very image of Nagen’s needle features thrust against Anna’s eyes; the spasm of revulsion in her frame was too quick for her habitual self-control.

At that juncture Weisspriess opened the door, and Anna’s eyes met his.

“You don’t spare me,” she murmured to Lena.

Her voice trembled, and Wilfrid bent his head

near her, pressing her hand, and said, "Not only I, but Countess Alessandra Ammiani exonerates you from blame. As she loves her country, you love yours. My words to Karl were an exaggeration of what I know and think. Only tell me this;—if Nagen captures Count Ammiani, how is he likely to deal with him?"

"How can I inform you?" Anna replied coldly; but she reflected in a fire of terror. She had given Nagen the prompting of a hundred angry exclamations in the days of her fever of hatred; she had nevertheless forgotten their parting words; that is, she had forgotten her mood when he started for Brescia, and the nature of the last instructions she had given him. Revolting from the thought of execution being done upon Count Ammiani, as one quickly springing out of fever dreams, all her white face went into little hard lines, like the withered snow which wears away in frost. "Yes," she said; and again, "Yes," to something Weisspriess whispered in her ear, she knew not clearly what. Weisspriess told Wilfrid that he would wait below. As he quitted the room, the duchess entered, and went up to Anna. "My good soul," she said, "you have, I trust, listened to Major Weisspriess. Oh, Anna! you wanted revenge. Now

take it, as becomes a high-born woman ; and let your enemy come to your feet, and don't spurn her when she is there. Must I inform you that I have been to Countess d'Isorella myself with a man who can compel her to speak? But Anna von Lenkenstein is not base like that Italian. Let them think of you as they will, I believe you to have a great heart. I am sure you will not allow personal sentiment to sully your devotion to our country. Show them that our Austrian faces can be bright; and meet her whom you call your enemy; you cannot fly. You must see her, or you betray yourself. The poor creature's husband is in danger of capture or death."

While the duchess's stern under-breath ran on hurriedly, convincing Anna that she had, with no further warning, to fall back upon her uttermost strength—the name of Countess Alessandra Ammiani was called at the door. Instinctively the others left a path between Vittoria and Anna. It was one of the moments when the adoption of a decisive course says more in vindication of conduct than long speeches. Anna felt that she was on her trial. For the first time since she had looked on this woman she noticed the soft splendour of Vittoria's eyes, and the harmony of her whole figure; nor was the black dress of protesting Italian mourning any longer

offensive in her sight, but on a sudden pitiful, for Anna thought: "It may at this very hour be for her husband, and she not knowing it." And with that she had a vision under her eyelids of Nagen like a shadowy devil in pursuit of men flying, and striking herself and Vittoria worse than dead in one blow levelled at Carlo Ammiani. A sense of supernatural horror chilled her blood when she considered again, facing her enemy, that their mutual happiness was by her own act involved in the fate of one life. She stepped farther than the halfway to greet her visitor, whose hands she took. Before a word was uttered between them, she turned to her brother, and with a clear voice said:

"Karl, the Countess Alessandra's husband, our old friend Carlo Ammiani, may need succour in his flight. Try to cross it; or better, get among those who are pursuing him, and don't delay one minute. You understand me."

Count Karl bowed his head, bitterly humbled.

Anna's eyes seemed to interrogate Vittoria, "Can I do more?" but her own heart answered her.

Inveterate when following up her passion for vengeance, she was fanatical in responding to the suggestions of remorse.

"Stay; I will despatch Major Weisspriess in my own name," she said. "He is a trusty messenger, and

he knows those mountains. Whoever is the officer broken for aiding Count Ammiani's escape, he shall be rewarded by me to the best of my ability. Countess Alessandra, I have anticipated your petition; I hope you may not have to reproach me. Remember that my country was in pieces when you and I declared war. You will not suffer without my suffering tenfold. Perhaps some day you will do me the favour to sing to me, when there is no chance of interruption. At present it is cruel to detain you."

Vittoria said simply: "I thank you, Countess Anna."

She was led out by Count Karl to where Merthyr awaited her. All wondered at the briefness of a scene that had unexpectedly brought the crisis to many emotions and passions, as the broken waters of the sea beat together and make here or there the wave which is topmost. Anna's grand initiative hung in their memories like the throbbing of a pulse, so hotly their sensations swarmed about it, and so intensely it embraced and led what all were desiring. The duchess kissed Anna, saying:

"That is a noble heart to which you have become reconciled. Though you should never be friends, as I am with one of them, you will esteem her. Do not suppose her to be cold. She is the mother of an

unborn little one, and for that little one's sake she follows out every duty ; she checks every passion in her bosom. She will spare no sacrifice to save her husband, but she has brought her mind to look at the worst, for fear that a shock should destroy her motherly guard."

"Really, duchess," Anna replied, "these are things for married women to hear ;" and she provoked some contempt of her conventional delicacy, at the same time that in her imagination the image of Vittoria struggling to preserve this burden of motherhood against a tragic mischance, completely humiliated and overwhelmed her, as if nature had also come to add to her mortifications.

"I am ready to confess everything I have done, and to be known for what I am," she said.

"Confess no more than is necessary, but do everything you can ; that's wisest," returned the duchess.

"Ah ! you mean that you have nothing to learn." Anna shuddered.

"I mean that you are likely to run into the other extreme of disfavoursing yourself just now, my child. And," continued the duchess, "you have behaved so splendidly that I *won't* think ill of you."

Before the day darkened, Wilfrid obtained, through

Prince Radocky's influence, an order addressed to Major Nagen for the surrender of prisoners into his hands. He and Count Karl started for the Val Camonica on the chance of intercepting the pursuit. These were not much wiser than their guesses and their apprehensions made them; but Weisspriess started on the like errand after an interview with Anna, and he had drawn sufficient intelligence out of sobs, and broken sentences, and torture of her spirit, to understand that if Count Ammiani fell alive or dead into Nagen's hands, Nagen by Anna's scrupulous oath, had a claim on her person and her fortune: and he knew Nagen to be a gambler. As he was Nagen's superior officer, and a near relative of the Brescian commandant, who would be induced to justify his steps, his object was to reach and arbitrarily place himself over Nagen, as if upon a special mission, and to get the lead of the expedition. For that purpose he struck somewhat higher above the Swiss borders than Karl and Wilfrid, and gained a district in the mountains above the vale perfectly familiar to him. Obeying directions forwarded to her by Wilfrid, Vittoria left Milan for the Val Camonica no later than the evening; Laura was with her in the carriage; Merthyr took horse after them as soon as he had succeeded in persuading

Countess Ammiani to pardon her daughter's last act of wilfulness, and believe that, during the agitation of unnumbered doubts, she ran less peril in the wilds where her husband fled, than in her home."

"I will trust to her idolatrously, as you do," Countess Ammiani said; "and perhaps she has already proved to me that I may."

Merthyr saw Agostino while riding out of Milan, and was seen by him; but the old man walked onward, looking moodily on the stones, and merely waved his hand behind.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE LAST.

THERE is hard winter overhead in the mountains when Italian spring walks the mountain-sides with flowers, and hangs deep valley-walls with flowers half fruit; the sources of the rivers above are set about with fangs of ice, while the full flat stream runs to a rose of sunlight. High among the mists and snows were the fugitives of Brescia, and those who for love or pity struggled to save them wandered through the blooming vales, sometimes hearing that they had crossed the frontier into freedom, and as often that they were scattered low in death and captivity. Austria here, Switzerland yonder, and but one depth between to bound across and win calm breathing. But mountain might call to mountain, peak shine to peak; a girdle of steel drove the hunted men back to frosty heights and clouds, the

shifting bosom of snows and lightnings. They saw nothing of hands stretched out to succour. They saw a sun that did not warm them, a home of exile inaccessible, crags like an earth gone to skeleton in hungry air; and below the land of their birth, beautiful, and sown everywhere for them with torture and captivity, and death the sweetest.

Fifteen men numbered the escape from Brescia. They fought their way twice through passes of the mountains, and might easily, in their first dash northward from the south-facing hills, have crossed to the Valteline and Engadine, but that in their insanity of anguish they meditated another blow, and were readier to march into the plains with the tricolor than to follow any course of flight. When the sun was no longer in their blood they thought of reason and of rest; they voted the expedition to Switzerland that so they should get round to Rome, and descended from the crags of the Tonale, under which they were drawn to an ambush, suffering three of their party killed, and each man bloody with wounds. The mountain befriended them, and gave them safety as truth is given by a bitter friend. Among icy crags and mists, where the touch of life grows dull as the nail of a forefinger, the features of the mountain were stamped on them, and with hunger they lost pride,

and with solitude laughter ; with endless fleeing they lost the aim of flight ; some became desperate, a few craven. Companionship was broken before they parted in three bodies, commanded severally by Colonel Corte, Carlo Ammiani, and Barto Rizzo. Corte reached the plains, masked by the devotion of Carlo's band, who lured the soldiery to a point and drew a chase while Corte passed the line, and pushed on for Switzerland. Carlo told off his cousin, Angelo Guidascarpi, in the list of those following Corte ; but when he fled up to the snows again, he beheld Angelo spectral as the vapour on a jut of rock awaiting him. Barto Rizzo had chosen his own way, none knew whither. Carlo, Angelo, Marco Sana, and a sharply-wounded Brescian lad, conceived the scheme of traversing the South Tyrol mountain-range towards Friuli, whence Venice, the still-breathing republic, might possibly be gained. They carried the boy in turn till his arms drooped long down, and when they knew the soul was out of him they buried him in snow, and thought him happy. It was then that Marco Sana took his death for an omen, and decided them to turn their heads once more towards Switzerland ; telling them that the boy, whom he last had carried, uttered "Rome" with the flying breath. Angelo said that Sana would get to Rome ; and Carlo, smiling on

Angelo, said they were to die twins though they had been born only cousins. The language they had fallen upon was mystical, scarce intelligible to other than themselves. On a clear morning, with the Swiss peaks in sight, they were condemned by want of food to quit their fastness for the valley.

Vittoria read the faces of the mornings as human creatures have tried to gather the sum of their destinies off changing surfaces,—fair not meaning fair, nor black black, but either the mask upon the secret of God's terrible will; and to learn it and submit, was the spiritual burden of her motherhood, that the child leaping with her heart might live. Not to hope blindly, in the exceeding anxiousness of her passionate love, or blindly to fear; not to let her soul fly out among the twisting chances; not to sap her great maternal duty by affecting false stoical serenity:—to nurse her soul's strength, and suckle her womanly weakness with the tears which are poison when repressed; to be at peace with a disastrous world for the sake of the dependent life unborn;—by such pure efforts she clung to God. Soft dreams of sacred nuptial tenderness, tragic images, wild pity, were like phantoms encircling her, plucking at her as she went, but they were beneath her feet, and she kept them from lodging between her breasts. The

thought that her husband, though he should have perished, was not a life lost if their child lived, sustained her powerfully. It seemed to whisper at times almost as it were Carlo's ghost breathing in her ears: "On thee!" On her the further duty devolved; and she trod down hope, lest it should build her up and bring a shock to surprise her fortitude; she put back alarm.

The mountains and the valleys scarce had names for her understanding; they were but a scene where the will of her Maker was at work. Rarely has a soul been so subjected by its own force. She certainly had the image of God in her mind.

Yet when her eyes lingered on any mountain gorge, the fate of her husband sang within it a strange chant, ending in a key that rang sounding through all her being, and seemed to question heaven. This music framed itself; it was still when she looked at the shrouded mountain-tops. A shadow meeting sunlight on the long green slopes aroused it, and it hummed above the tumbling hasty foam, and penetrated hanging depths of foliage, sad-hued rock-clefts, dark green ravines; it became convulsed where the mountain threw forward in a rushing upward line against the sky, there to be severed at the head by cloud. It was silent among the vines.

Most painfully did human voices affect her when she had this music ; speech was a scourge to her sense of hearing, and touch distressed her : an edge of purple flame would then unfold the vision of things to her eyes. She had lost memory ; and if by hazard unawares one idea was projected by some sudden tumult of her enslaved emotions beyond known and visible circumstances, her intelligence darkened with an oppressive dread like that of zealots of the guilt of impiety.

Thus destitute, her eyes took innumerable pictures sharp as on a brass-plate : torrents, goat-tracks winding up red earth, rocks veiled with water, cottage and children, strings of villagers mounting to the church, one woman kneeling before a wayside cross, her basket at her back, and her child gazing idly by ; perched hamlets, rolling pasture-fields, the vast mountain lines. She asked all that she saw, " Does he live ? " but the life was out of everything, and these shows told of no life, neither of joy nor of grief. She could only distantly connect the appearance of the white-coated soldiery with the source of her trouble. They were no more than figures on a screen that hid the flashing of the sword which renders dumb. She had charity for one who was footsore and sat cherishing his ankle by a village spring, and she fed

him, and not until he was far behind, thought that he might have seen the white face of her husband.

Accurate tidings could not be obtained, though the whole course of the vale was full of stories of escapes, conflicts, and captures. Merthyr learnt positively that some fugitives had passed the cordon. He came across Wilfrid and Count Karl, who both verified it in the most sanguine manner. They knew, however, that Major Nagen continued in the mountains. Riding by a bend of the road, Merthyr beheld a man playing among children, with one hand and his head down apparently for concealment at his approach. It proved to be Beppo. The man believed that Count Ammiani had fled to Switzerland. Barto Rizzo, he said, was in the mountains still, and Beppo invoked damnation on him, as the author of those lying proclamations which had ruined Brescia. He had got out of the city later than the others, and was seeking to evade the outposts, that he might join his master—"that is, my captain, for I've only one master;" he corrected the slip of his tongue appealingly to Merthyr. His left hand was being continually plucked at by the children while he talked, and after Merthyr had dispersed them with a shower of small coin, he showed the hand, saying, glad of eye, that it had taken a sword-cut intended for Count Ammiani.

Merthyr sent him back to mount the carriage, enjoining him severely not to speak.

When Carlo and his companions descended from the mountains, they entered a village where there was an inn recognised by Angelo as the abode of Jacopo Cruchi. He there revived Carlo's animosity towards Weisspriess by telling the tale of the passage to Meran, and his good reasons for determining to keep guard over the Countess Alessandra all the way. Subsequently Angelo went to Jacopo for food. This he procured, but he was compelled to leave the man behind, and unpaid. It was dark when he left the inn; he had some difficulty in evading a flock of whitecoats, and his retreat from the village was still on the Austrian 'side. Somewhat about midnight Merthyr reached the inn, heralding the carriage. As Jacopo caught sight of Vittoria's face, he fell with his shoulders straightened against the wall, and cried out loudly that he had betrayed no one, and mentioned Major Weisspriess by name as having held the point of his sword at him and extracted nothing better than a wave of the hand and a lie; in other words, that the fugitives had retired to the Tyrolese mountains, and that he had shammed ignorance of who they were. Merthyr read at a glance that Jacopo had the large swallow and calm digestion for bribes,

and getting the fellow alone he laid money in view, out of which, by doubling the sum to make Jacopo correct his first statement, and then by threatening to withdraw it altogether, he gained knowledge of the fact that Angelo Guidascarpi had recently visited the inn and had started from it south-eastward, and that Major Weisspriess was following on his track. He wrote a line of strong entreaty to Weisspriess, lest that officer should perchance relapse into anger at the taunts of prisoners abhorring him with the hatred of Carlo and Angelo. At the same time he gave Beppo a considerable supply of money, and then sent him off, armed as far as possible to speed Count Ammiani safe across the borders, if a fugitive; or if a prisoner, to ensure the best which could be hoped for him from an adversary become generous. That evening Vittoria lay with her head on Laura's lap, and the little pearly crescent of her ear in moonlight by the window. So fair and young and still she looked that Merthyr feared for her, and thought of sending her back to Countess Ammiani.

Her first question with the lifting of her eyelids was if he had ceased to trust to her courage.

"No," said Merthyr; "there are bounds to human strength; that is all."

She answered: "There would be to mine if I had

not more than human strength beside me. I bow my head, dearest ; it is that. I feel that I cannot break down so long as I know what is passing. Does my husband live ? ”

“ Yes, he lives,” said Merthyr ; and she gave him her hand, and went to her bed.

He learnt from Laura that when Beppo mounted the carriage in silence, a fit of ungovernable wild trembling had come on her, broken at intervals by a cry that something was concealed. Laura could give no advice ; she looked on Merthyr and Vittoria as two that had an incomprehensible knowledge of the power of one another’s natures, and the fiery creature remained passive in perplexity of mind, as soft an attendant as a suffering woman could have.

Merthyr did not sleep, and in the morning Vittoria said to him, “ You want to be active, my friend. Go, and we will wait for you here. I know that I am never deceived by you, and when I see you I know that the truth speaks, and bids me be worthy of it. Go up there,” she pointed with shut eyes at the mountains ; “ leave me to pray for greater strength. I am among Italians at this inn, and shall spend money here ; the poor people love it.” She smiled a little, showing a glimpse of her old charitable humour.

Merthyr counselled Laura that in case of evil tidings during his absence she should reject her feminine ideas of expediency, and believe that she was speaking to a brave soul firmly rooted in the wisdom of heaven.

“Tell her?—she will die,” said Laura, shuddering.

“Get tears from her,” Merthyr rejoined; “but hide nothing from her for a single instant; keep her in daylight. For God’s sake, keep her in daylight.

“It’s too sharp a task for me.” She repeated that she was incapable of it.

“Ah,” said he, “look at your Italy, how she weeps! and she has cause. She would die in her grief, if she had no faith for what is to come. I dare say it is not, save in the hearts of one or two, a conscious faith, but it’s real Divine strength; and Alessandra Ammiani has it. Do as I bid you. I return in two days.”

Without understanding him, Laura promised that she would do her utmost to obey, and he left her muttering to herself as if she were schooling her lips to speak reluctant words. He started for the mountains with gladdened limbs, taking a guide, who gave his name as Lorenzo, and talked of having been ‘out’ in the previous year. “I am a patriot, signore! and not only in opposition to my beast of a

wife, I assure you : a downright patriot, I mean." Merthyr was tempted to discharge him at first, but controlled his English antipathy to babblers, and discovered him to be a serviceable fellow. Towards nightfall they heard shots up a rock-strewn combe of the lower slopes ; desultory shots indicating rifle-firing at long range. Darkness made them seek shelter in a pine-hut ; starting from which at dawn, Lorenzo ran beating about like a dog over the place where the shots had sounded on the foregoing day ; he found a stone spotted with blood. Not far from the stone lay a military glove that bore brown-crimson finger-ends. They were striking off to a dairy-hut for fresh milk, when out of a crevice of rock overhung by shrubs a man's voice called, and Merthyr climbing up from perch to perch, saw Marco Sana lying at half length, shot through hand and leg. From him Merthyr learnt that Carlo and Angelo had fled higher up ; yesterday they had been attacked by Weisspriess, who tried to lure them to surrender by coming forward at the head of his men and offering safety, and " other gabble," said Marco. He offered a fair shot at his heart, too, while he stood below a rock that Marco pointed at gloomily as a hope gone for ever ; but Carlo would not allow advantage to be taken of even the treacherous simulation of

chivalry, and only permitted firing after he had returned to his men. "I was hit here and here," said Marco, touching his wounds, as men can hardly avoid doing when speaking of the fresh wound. Merthyr got him on his feet, put money in his pocket, and led him off the big stones painfully. "They give no quarter," Marco assured him, and reasoned that it must be so, for they had not taken him prisoner, though they saw him fall, and ran by or in view of him in pursuit of Carlo. By this Merthyr was convinced that Weisspriess meant well. He left his guide in charge of Marco to help him into the Engadine. Greatly to his astonishment, Lorenzo tossed the back of his hand at the offer of money. "There *shall* be this difference between me and my wife," he remarked; "and besides, gracious signore, serving my countrymen for nothing, that's for love, and the Tedeschi can't punish me for it, so it's one way of cheating them, the wolves!" Merthyr shook his hand and said, "Instead of my servant, be my friend;" and Lorenzo made no feeble mouth, but answered, "Signore, it is much to my honour," and so they went different ways.

Left to himself Merthyr set his steps vigorously upward. Information from herdsmen told him that he was an hour off the foot of one of the passes. He

begged them to tell any hunted men who might come within hail that a friend ran seeking them. Farther up, while thinking of the fine nature of that Lorenzo, and the many men like him who could not by the very existence of nobility in their bosoms suffer their country to go through another generation of servitude, his heart bounded immensely, for he heard a shout and his name, and he beheld two figures on a rock near the gorge where the mountain opened to its heights. But they were not Carlo and Angelo. They were Wilfrid and Count Karl, the latter of whom had discerned him through a telescope. They had good news to revive him, however: good at least in the main. Nagen had captured Carlo and Angelo, they believed; but they had left Weisspriess near on Nagen's detachment, and they furnished sound military reasons to show why, if Weisspriess favoured the escape, they should not be present. They supposed that they were not half a mile from the scene in the pass where Nagen was being forcibly deposed from his authority. Merthyr borrowed Count Karl's glass, and went as they directed him round a bluff of the descending hills, that faced the vale, much like a blown and beaten sea-cliff. Wilfrid and Karl were so certain of Count Ammiani's safety, that their only thought

was to get under good cover before nightfall, and haply into good quarters, where the three proper requirements of the soldier—meat, wine, and tobacco—might be furnished to them. After an imperative caution that they should not present themselves before the Countess Alessandra, Merthyr sped quickly over the broken ground. How gaily the two young men cheered to him as he hurried on! He met a sort of pedlar turning the blunt-faced mountain-spur, and this man said, “Yes, sure enough, prisoners had been taken,” and he was not aware of harm having been done to them; he fancied there was a quarrel between two captains. His plan being always to avoid the military, he had slunk round and away from them as fast as might be. An Austrian common soldier, a good-humoured German, distressed by a fall that had hurt his knee-cap, sat within the gorge, which was very wide at the mouth. Merthyr questioned him, and he, while mending one of his gathered cigar-ends, pointed to a meadow near the beaten track, some distance up the rocks. Whitecoats stood thick on it. Merthyr lifted his telescope and perceived an eager air about the men, though they stood ranged in careless order. He began to mount forthwith, but amazed by a sudden ringing of shot, he stopped, asking himself

in horror whether it could be an execution. The shots and the noise increased, until the confusion of a positive mellay reigned above. The fall of the meadow swept to a bold crag right over the pathway, and with a projection that seen sideways made a vulture's head and beak of it. There rolled a corpse down the precipitous wave of green grass on to the crag, where it lodged, face to the sky ; sword dangled from sword-knot at one wrist, heels and arms were in air, and the body caught midway hung poised and motionless. The firing deadened. Then Merthyr drawing nearer beneath the crag, saw one who had life in him slipping down towards the body, and knew the man for Beppo. Beppo knocked his hands together and groaned miserably, but flung himself astride the beak of the crag, and took the body in his arms, sprang down with it, and lay stunned at Merthyr's feet. Merthyr looked on the face of Carlo Ammiani.

EPILOGUE.

No uncontested version of the tragedy of Count Ammiani's death passed current in Milan during many years. With time it became disconnected from passion, and took form in a plain narrative. He and Angelo were captured by Major Nagen, and were, as the soldiers of the force subsequently let it be known, roughly threatened with what he termed 'Brescian short credit.' The appearance of Major Weisspriess and his claim to the command created a violent discussion between the two officers. Weisspriess succeeded in establishing his ascendancy ; upon which he spoke to the prisoners, telling Carlo that for his wife's sake he should be free on the morrow, and Angelo that he must expect the fate of a murderer. His address to them was deliberate, and quite courteous; he expressed himself sorry that a gallant gentleman like Angelo Guidascari should merit a bloody grave, but so it was. At the same time he entreated Count Ammiani to rely on his determination to save him. Major Nagen did not stand far removed from them. Carlo turned to him and repeated the words of Weisspriess; nor could Angelo restrain his cousin's vehement renunciation of

hope and life in doing this. He accused Weisspriess of a long evasion of a brave man's obligation to repair an injury, charged him with cowardice, and requested Major Nagen, as a man of honour, to drag his brother officer to the duel. Nagen then said that Major Weisspriess was his superior in the command, adding that his gallant brother officer had only of late objected to vindicate his reputation with his sword. Stung finally beyond the control of an irritable temper, Weisspriess walked out of sight of the soldiery with Carlo, to whom, at a special formal request from Weisspriess, Nagen handed his sword. Again he begged Count Ammiani to abstain from fighting; yea, to strike him and disable him, and fly, rather than provoke the skill of his right hand. Carlo demanded his cousin's freedom. It was denied to him, and Carlo claimed his privilege. The witnesses of the duel were Jenna and another young subaltern: both declared it fair according to the laws of honour, when their stupefaction on beholding the proud swordsman of the army stretched lifeless on the brown leaves of the past year, left them with power to speak. Thus did Carlo slay his old enemy who would have served as his friend. A shout of rescue was heard before Carlo had yielded up his weapon. Four haggard and desperate men, headed by Barto

Rizzo, burst from an ambush on the guard encircling Angelo. There, with the one thought of saving his doomed cousin and comrade, Carlo rushed, and not one Italian survived the fight.

An unarmed spectator upon the meadow-borders, Beppo, had but obscure glimpses of scenes shifting like a sky in advance of hurricane winds.

Merthyr delivered the burden of death to Vittoria. Her soul had crossed the darkness of the river of death in that quiet agony preceding the revelation of her Maker's will, and she drew her dead husband to her bosom and kissed him on the eyes and the forehead, not as one who had quite gone away from her, but as one who lay upon another shore whither she would come. The manful friend, ever by her side, saved her by his absolute trust in her fortitude to bear the great sorrow undeceived, and to walk with it to its last resting-place on earth unobstructed. Clear knowledge of her, the issue of reverent love, enabled him to read her unequalled strength of nature, and to rely on her fidelity to her highest mortal duty in a conflict with extreme despair. She lived through it as her Italy had lived through the hours which brought her face to face with her dearest in death; and she also on the day, ten years later, when an Emperor and a King stood beneath the vault of the

grand Duomo, and the organ and a peal of voices rendered thanks to Heaven for liberty, could show the fruit of her devotion in the dark-eyed boy, Carlo Merthyr Ammiani, standing between Merthyr and her, with old blind Agostino's hands upon his head. And then once more, and but for once, her voice was heard in Milan.

THE END.



